

The  
Social Message  
of the  
Book of Revelation

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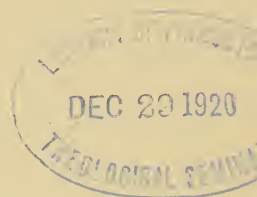






THE SOCIAL MESSAGE  
OF THE  
BOOK OF REVELATION

BY ✓  
RAYMOND CALKINS



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TO HER  
WHOSE LIFE HAS BEEN TO ME A  
REVELATION  
OF FAITH AND HOPE AND LOVE



*“Surely I come quickly. Amen.  
Even so come, Lord Jesus.”*





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## INTRODUCTION

THE Book of Revelation is one of the least used and least understood books in all the Bible. Every Bible reader recalls with gratitude a few chapters at the beginning of the book with their beautiful promises "to him that overcometh"; and every one reads a few chapters at the end of the book which tell of the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, where there shall be no more curse or pain or death.

But the book as a whole is a closed book to all but a small minority of Bible readers. To most people, this book, with the exception of the chapters to which I have referred, is a jargon of strange figures of speech—a fantastic conglomeration of beasts with men's heads, of dragons cast into fathomless pits, of serpents casting floods out of their mouths, of locusts with the hair of women and tails like scorpions. It is a vast arena that resounds to noise of battle as trumpets sound, and seals are broken and vials are emptied. "To most people its bizarre imagery, its complicated structure, its general unintelligibility make it a gigantic riddle. It seems to them, perhaps, to form a strange anti-climax to that splendid literature of the soul which preceded it. They are at home in the Gospels and in the Epistles; but in this strange world of earthquake and eclipse, of fury and agony, of tramping armies and thundering angel-music, they are perplexed and repelled."<sup>1</sup> Why is this book in the New Testament at all? What does it mean? Does it mean anything?

If anything were needed to complete the dismay with which the average Bible reader views this book, it is supplied by the use which is made of it by those Bible students who

<sup>1</sup> Cairns, *Christianity in the Modern World*, pp. 216-217.

claim that its purpose is to tell us about the end of the world, the physical second coming of Christ, the millennium, the second death and the general resurrection. On the basis of its prophecies, we are told, we can figure out when all these events will happen, for the book contains the key to all these mysteries. But because the doctrine of a material millennium and a physical second coming bewilders and repels more people than it illumines or attracts, many have closed their minds more firmly than ever against a book which seems to contain such teaching. They determine that they will let the book severely and altogether alone. Thus it has come to pass that one of the most inspired and inspiring and useful books in the Bible has been neglected by Bible readers and Bible students. It has no place in their everyday Bible, the Bible which they use for the support of their own souls, or for light upon the pressing problems of the hour. They never turn to it except in time of personal bereavement. They think of it, if at all, only as containing beautiful and imaginative descriptions of Heaven, and promises of crowns of victory to those who overcome.

As a matter of fact, the Book of Revelation is one of the most practical books in the Bible. No book in the New Testament, with the exception of the Gospels, contains so much inspiration for one who is actively engaged in a daily struggle against evil in himself and in the world. It is full of help for all who are wrestling with the problem of evil in any form. It is a book to be used not only for the light which it throws upon the future life, but for the streams of light which it throws upon the life which now is. It is not primarily the vision of another world; it is rather a trumpet-call for courageous living in the present world. Especially in a time of rebuilding such as the present, when the problems of life are so many, its burdens so great, its calls to service so insistent, the real message of this book is needed by all who hunger and labor for righteousness.

The purpose of these pages is to set forth this message of the Book of Revelation clearly and briefly. They are written with the general reader in mind as well as Bible students and Bible class leaders. They offer an interpretation of the book which the author believes to be its underlying message, and one which is perhaps more suited to the present than to any other age since the book was first written. It is now that the Book of Revelation needs to be read and understood. The effort has been made to suggest, rather than to elaborate, the spiritual lessons of its chapters and to indicate briefly the meaning of the text. There has been no attempt to discuss at all completely the many Biblical and historical problems involved. For these, the reader is referred to more competent authorities. The idea is to exhibit the one simple and wonderful truth which, like a golden thread, runs through all the chapters, and to suggest the permanent social value of that truth for all militant souls who are enlisted for life as soldiers of the cross and "followers of the Lamb." The author hopes that this great Bible book will indeed be a revelation of heretofore unrealized and unutilized sources of faith and inspiration and courage.

The indebtedness of the writer to other authors has been indicated in the footnotes. Special acknowledgments are due to Dr. Beckwith whose admirable recent commentary has furnished many of the Bible references, and to Dr. Porter whose volume has suggested many suggestions in interpretation and in the paraphrases of the text.

Cambridge, Massachusetts.

March, 1920.



# SOCIAL MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## CHAPTER I

### PURPOSE AND MESSAGE

THE best and quickest way to understand any book is to ask why and when it was written. The answer to these questions makes clear to us the purpose and the message of the Book of Revelation. This book was first written to meet an extraordinary emergency in the life of the early church. It was written to inspire a church beneath the Cross and threatened with extermination at the hands of the Roman Empire. The church, when this book made its appearance, was on the eve of a life and death struggle with Rome. The signs of the times were all focused on a fierce contest between Christ and Cæsar. The Book of Revelation therefore has a great historic interest for the student of the New Testament, in that it marks the transition from the earlier tolerant attitude of Rome toward the new faith to its later implacable hostility. Readers of the epistles of St. Paul will all remember that he kept appealing, and not in vain, from the attacks of his Jewish antagonists, to the protection of the Roman governors and magistrates. More than once these officials delivered the Apostle from the hands of the Jews; they rescued him in Jerusalem from the hands of an angry mob intent on murdering him; from his prison in Palestine he appealed unto Cæsar, and he urged upon his converts submission to Roman rule and authority. (Rom. 13:1-5.)

Thirty years after his death, however, all this was changed. The Roman Empire realized at last that the Christian faith was challenging its authority and had become its irreconcilable rival. In the Book of Revelation we have the first expression of the Christian faith as it asserted itself and took its stand over against the great world power which had now become its outspoken enemy. It was inevitable that Rome and Christianity should come to grips. When the Book of Revelation was written, that time had arrived. "The historical background of the book is the Roman Empire, and especially the worship of the emperors and its enforcement in Asia Minor."<sup>1</sup>

During the reign of Domitian, who died in the year 96 A.D., an edict had gone forth that his subjects, especially in Asia Minor, should worship him as God. All students of Roman history are familiar with this strange and almost unbelievable cult which developed in the later days of the Roman Empire. Augustus had declined to be thus worshiped in Rome, but he had encouraged it in the provinces, probably as a means of knitting them more firmly to the Empire and to the Emperor. "It was not meant to displace the nature religions but to have recognition by their side, in a more or less close relation to them. It was valued by the emperors as an effective means of Romanizing the empire and hence was furthered especially where Roman culture did not prevail, and in the Orient where it would cause least offense. It was, in fact, offensive only to monotheistic faiths, Judaism and Christianity, which could not worship God and Cæsar. In general the Jews fared better than the Christians during this period."<sup>2</sup> Both Cæsar and Augustus had granted exemption to the Jews because of their numbers and because of their well-known aversion to idolatrous practices. Rome was not inclined to grant these privileges to Christians. During the reign of Nero, this policy of enforcing emperor-worship in the provinces had steadily grown. It was developed by Caligula; but it came to its climax in Domitian's

<sup>1</sup> See Porter, *Messages of the Apocalyptical Writers*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Porter, *ibid.*, pp. 185-186.



time, in Asia Minor where the earliest Christian churches had been planted. There for the first time it was proposed that this cult should be enforced by law and backed by all the power of the Roman government.

We have no details. We do not even possess the wording of the edict. But we have the facts. Sometime about 90 A.D., under the Emperor Domitian and presumably with his approval, this worship of the Emperor was enforced in Asia Minor by the priests of the cult and the governors of the provinces. Only the Jews were to be exempt. The Orientals accepted the new worship with enthusiasm. There was left to resist only the little and apparently helpless band of Christians. When the Book of Revelation was written, that was the situation. Rome and Christianity were at last face to face.

We do not know how far compulsion had already gone when the book was written. Presumably there had already been a few martyrdoms (Rev. 2:13), but there was every reason to expect a general persecution of the church, as Rome set itself to the task of exterminating Christianity. To the church in such an hour of peril the Book of Revelation is addressed. It calls on all who have named the Name of Christ to be faithful to the end. It unfolds vast and inspiring visions of the power of God and of the omnipotence of Christ. It tells of the deathlessness of his saints and of the certainty of victory. It predicts the downfall of Rome and the destruction of evil. It calls on Christ's followers to mobilize to meet the enemy; to fight, to endure, to suffer, to die for the sake of the Name; and it promises to all who overcome a crown of life.

If we understand the emergency which caused the book to be written, the interpretation of it for its time, for our time, and for all time, becomes as clear as daylight. In the light of this explanation, how far from the truth becomes that use of it which finds the chief meaning of the book in the hints it gives us about the wind-up of creation, the end of the world,

and the nature of the Last Judgment! As a matter of fact, there is only one chapter that even appears to refer to these distant and mysterious events. To use Revelation in this way is to abuse it, for the book itself makes no claim to be a key to the future. "The predictions in the book relate to the immediate and not to the remote future, as the writer most explicitly affirms" (1:1,3; 22:10-12), and its value lies "not in disclosures of history in the nineteen following centuries, nor of forecasts of still future events . . . , but rather in its fitness to brace the Christian faith to meet one of the great crises of its history, and permanently in the faith that inspires it in the rule of God and the certain victory of his cause." We must put out of our mind the ideas which centuries of misuse have caused to prevail about the book. The beast is not the Sultan or the Pope of Rome or Napoleon or the Kaiser, but rather Nero and the Emperor Domitian whom the Christians had been commanded to worship. The harlot is not the church of Rome, as certain Protestant writers have declared, but rather the Roman Empire which had decreed the death of all who failed to worship its head as God. All the conglomerate figures that fill the book are the hosts of those who fight either on the side of the beast or on the side of the lamb. Here we have the "cry of the Christian heart tortured by the pressure of the Pagan Empire." Here we have Christian prophecy directed against contemporary evil, and designed to rescue contemporary Christianity from overthrow, to inspire it to resistance, and to predict its victory in the time in which its author lived.

It requires no great gift of imagination to realize what such a flaming message must have meant to that church beneath the cross; what inspiration it brought to those threatened with death; what consolation it gave to those whose friends may already have suffered death "for the sake of the Name"; what joy it yielded to those who read these horrific descriptions of how their persecutors were to be destroyed, of how wicked and cruel Rome, the mother of abominations, drunk

with the blood of saints, was to go down in the crash and wreck of ruin as she is made desolate by famine and plague, and is cast into the lake of fire. With what exaltation of spirit do you imagine they would respond to that vision of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; or read of that coming day when God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, when the former things are passed away?

Such, then, was the particular spiritual emergency which caused this book to be written. It was a flaming Tract of Faith for Bad Times. It was intended to encourage God's people under oppression and suffering. Its object was to steel them to patience and endurance by the presentation in vivid form of the fact that overrides all other facts, that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth and will come with a recompense. Understand the crisis which called this book forth, and its spiritual value becomes clear as crystal. In the flaming up of faith in the hour of darkness lies the wonder of Revelation. In its extraordinary exaltation of spirit, when apparently there is no rift in the clouds, nor sign of hope anywhere, lies its permanent religious value. In the sheer strength of its proclamation of victory, when nothing but defeat and death are apparently visible, lies its claim to the gratitude and love of Christians for all time.

Such a book could not possibly end its mission with the particular circumstances that called it forth. It is an immortal appeal to fortitude and to faith whenever and wherever evil threatens the good, wrong apparently triumphs over right, and the children of God are overborne by the forces of sin. All through the centuries of Christian struggle this has been the book of comfort and of hope for the witnessing servants of Jesus Christ. Centuries later when the growing church was in its final death-grapple with the Roman Empire—a struggle which issued in a far greater victory than even the seer of Patmos was able to discern, the Christianization of Rome itself

—this book above all others sustained the courage and animated the faith of those who bore witness to their faith with their lives. In the days of the Reformation when thousands were called upon to die for the liberty of conscience, the freedom of the soul, and the purity of faith, no part in the Bible was read with greater fervor than this inspired book which still spoke of the certainty of victory and the triumph of the faithful. More than one Christian martyr had died with the last words of this book upon his lips: "Surely I come quickly: even so, come, Lord Jesus." And to-day, for the lonely missionary confronting single-handed and alone the great solid and apparently immovable evils entrenched in non-Christian civilizations, for the social worker with his back to the wall fighting against the hosts of wickedness in high places, to the individual Christian who feels the hot breath of evil in his face and does not know how he is to overcome it, there is no inspiration in the Bible to be compared with that of this Book of Revelation.

Days like those in which we live are the very days for which this book was written. A time such as the present, is the time for Christians everywhere to take up this book and read it, and to lay its true message next to their hearts. It is sheer tragedy to go through experiences such as this generation has known without the spiritual support and inspiration which Revelation can furnish us. We are living in an epoch that corresponds to that for which the book was written. Evil seems to be on the throne. The destinies of the world are at stake. Cruelty has done its worst. If ever people needed bracing, we need it now. If ever mankind needed the message of this book, it needs that message now. "Fear none of these things that thou shalt suffer; behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." Read about the beast, your beast that threatens you with destruction, and read how the Lamb on the throne shall overcome him, for he is Lord of

Lords and King of Kings. Listen to the song of the redeemed who chant their psalms of deliverance and victory, who reign forever and forever, and remember that the same victory is yours if you, like them, will be faithful to the end.

The book contains five distinct and imperishable spiritual messages for its time and for all time.

1. It is an irresistible summons to heroic living. To read Revelation aright makes one ashamed if he has not thrown himself body and soul into the struggle for righteousness. It is the most militant book in the Bible. It tells us that there is no place for a neutral in the everlasting fight between God and Satan, the Dragon and the Lamb. The laissez-faire Christian will feel lost in this book; he will not answer to its message because he does not feel himself involved in its issues. But the truly militant Christian who feels that his own life is bound up with these issues, simply cannot do without its appeal to fortitude and its assurance of victory.

2. This book contains matchless appeals to endurance. "Hold fast that which thou hast that no man take thy crown." "Be ye faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life." We all know the almost hypnotic effect of certain phrases, the strange impression they produce upon the psychology of a soul. The words, "They shall not pass!" made the defenders of Verdun a rampart of steel. Precisely this is the influence produced by the message of the Book of Revelation upon those who lay it to heart. Yielding becomes a psychological impossibility. One lays it down and says, "To doubt would be disloyalty, to falter would be sin." That is why in any period of discouragement, such as the world is now experiencing, this book should be read and re-read. It can contribute immensely to the morale of mankind. Moral endurance will tell the story in fateful years such as these. The reading of no literature in the world will do more to heighten courage, hearten faith, steel men's souls to patience and to the uttermost limits of endurance as the reading of this old, neglected Book of Revelation.



3. This book tells us that evil is marked for overthrow *in the end*. Here is to be no inconclusive struggle, no stalemate, no peace without victory. It is not to be an easy or a speedy triumph. Nothing in all this book is more wonderful than the full justice that is done to the powers of evil. Behind their manifestations and their effects, the prophet goes to the real source of their strength—to Satan and his angels who have for a season all power to make war upon the servants of the Lamb. We do not know just when the end may be. Satan may be bound for a while and then break loose again. The end may not even be in sight. Victory may mean the death and martyrdom of many of the saints of Christ. But, in the end, the powers of darkness are marked for destruction. Whatever else evil is here for, it is here to be conquered. It is not Christ who is going to be defeated:

And the beast was taken and with him the false prophet . . . and they twain shall be cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone and the remnant were slain with the sword of him who sat upon the horse whose sword proceeded out of his mouth, and death and Hell were cast into the lake of fire, and whosoever was not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth and the holy city of the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. And I heard a great voice saying, behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with men, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. (Rev. 19: 20, 21; 20: 14, 15; 21: 1, 2, 3.)

4. It gives us a new and wonderful picture of Christ. Too long has the picture of Christ been that of the meek and loving Jesus. But that picture cannot stand alone, not in a world like this. If many men have lost faith in Christ, it is because the Christ of Galilee has seemed to them to be too idyllic, radiating too much of charm, but too little of strength; a gracious, kindly teacher; a guest whose garments have not known the stain of warfare or the blood of struggle; a lover of little children; a compassionate helper of the sick and the sinful; "a being of extreme gentleness and delicacy and of the utmost tolerance and subtlest sympathy; a saint of non-

resistance"<sup>1</sup>—but not the heroic leader, not the masterful champion, not the all-conquering Captain of our salvation.

Out from this last book of the Bible wherein is fought the final fight of faith, there emerges the picture of Christ that is adequate to the uttermost needs of his suffering and struggling people:

And I saw the heavens opened, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon it was called faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. And his eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns, and he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses clothed in fine linen, white and clean, and out of his mouth a sharp sword goeth that with it he should smite the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron. and he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of the Almighty, and he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Rev. 19:11-16).

5. Finally, this Apocalypse reveals to us the fact that history is in the mind of God and in the hand of Christ as the author and the reviewer of the moral destinies of men. Here is no mere evolutionary theory of history; here is no mere idea that the "thoughts of men grow broader," etc.; it is no impersonal, automatic and scientific process which is going to toss us into our promised land; it is not even a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness. The Apocalypse rather shows us God at work behind the framework which we call the universe. It shows us Christ as the maker of history; it looks upon Him as marching on in the glory of his strength, putting all things under his feet. It looks upon moral victory as his victory, and sees Him standing on the field of history, conquering and to conquer, only not yet hath He put all things under his feet. There come moments in the moral life of men—and who shall say that the present age is not one?—in which no other interpretation of history will suffice; in which the incarnation itself, and nothing short of it, will serve as the sure basis of the Social Hope.

<sup>1</sup> H. G. Wells, *God, the Invisible King*, pp. 101, 102.

## CHAPTER II

### LANGUAGE AND STYLE

ONE of the chief reasons why the modern reader feels lost in the Book of Revelation and finds himself bewildered and dismayed as he seeks to understand it, is because of the language in which it is written. Its style is not only peculiar but it seems often to be almost repellent. One can make nothing intelligible out of certain passages, as for example, the twelfth chapter in which is set forth a woman clad in the sun, with the moon under her feet, giving birth to a son whom a great red dragon is ready to destroy—which is cast down from heaven to earth where it continues to persecute the woman and her seed. What, one asks, does all this mean? Does it mean anything? Whence this imagery? What religious use can it have for us to-day?

The reader of the Book of Revelation, however, would not be so much perplexed by its language if he were more familiar with certain other portions of the Bible in which similar language is used. What we need to remember is that this mode of speech which seems so strange to us was not strange at all to the first readers of this book, and would not be strange to us if we knew our Old Testament better than we do. Nearly every figure of speech used in this book was taken bodily out of some portion of the Old Testament. The locusts and the dragon, the beast and the scarlet woman, the tree of life, the sea of glass mingled with fire, the horsemen, the harvesters—these are not used for the first time in the Book of Revelation. They constitute a religious dialect that was familiar to Jews and to Jewish Christians, the meaning and purpose



of which were well understood. This was not the first book of its kind; it would be much truer to call it the last. The Book of Revelation is simply what may be called the Christian climax to a kind of writing which had had a history extending over five hundred years. The idea of a beast did not confuse the first readers of this book because they knew that the Book of Daniel was full of beasts and they knew what those beasts meant. The idea of locusts with the hair of women and the tails of serpents did not bother them, because they knew all about them from the Book of Joel. All of the imagery and strange symbols were perfectly intelligible to them, and they would be to us if we knew our Bibles better. In order, therefore, to understand this language and to feel familiar with it, it is necessary to inquire into its origin and to understand why it was used and what meaning it was intended to convey.

Now all readers of the Old Testament are aware that prophecy after the Exile takes on a new form and a new color. Indeed, the Book of Zephaniah, written before the exile, may be said to mark the beginnings of apocalyptic prophecy.<sup>1</sup> But the Book of Ezekiel really marks the transition from the old form of prophecy to the new. The very opening chapter of Ezekiel reads like certain passages in the Book of Revelation. Here we have cloud, wind and fire, four living creatures with four faces and four wings, a chariot with wheels like beryl, a throne like a sapphire stone and a man on it with the likeness of the glory of Jehovah. Ezekiel, in a word, *reads differently*, except in a few chapters of the book, from Amos and Hosea and Isaiah. The language is different, the ideas are different, the tone and color are different. If this is true of Ezekiel, it is even more true of Zechariah, and of Joel, and above all, of Daniel. The pages of the prophets from the time of Ezekiel on are increasingly crowded with

<sup>1</sup> See Zeph. 1:14-18, and cf. G. A. Smith. "His book is the first tinging of prophecy with apocalypse." Minor Prophets, Zephaniah, Chap. III.

figures of angels and archangels and all the heavenly host, with visions and fantastic imagery.

The question is, What caused this change to overtake the language and ideas of the Old Testament prophets? The answer, once more, must be found in the historical background of these post-exilic prophets. In a word, it was the Exile, that prodigious disaster that ruined all the national hopes of the Jews, which transformed the message of the prophets, and changed the character and purpose of their writings. Down to that time prophecy was largely ethical. It dealt with man's duties to God. Its refrain was, "What doth the Lord require of thee?" It consisted of exhortations to righteousness, rebuke of evil, denunciation of national sins, and promises of national prosperity based on moral obedience to the law and will of God. This is the form of prophecy with which we are most familiar.

But when the overthrow of Jerusalem had taken place, and the people were confronted with apparently fatal and irredeemable disaster, then prophecy changes its tone and form to meet the emergency and to satisfy the spiritual needs of the people. Now it was not a question of what man should do for God, but of what God could do for man. Now was not the time to talk of man's duty to God, but of God's duty to man. What moves the heart of the prophet now is not the conversion of the people, but deliverance from trouble. It was not the reformation of the people but salvation by the Most High that inspired prophecy in its new form. During the five hundred years that marked the humiliation and degradation of the Jewish people under the successive tyranny of Babylonian and Assyrian, of Persian, Greek and Roman conquerors, prophecy lifted its voice in an agony of appeal to the Ancient of Days, to the omnipotent God, to bare his arm in the sight of all nations. The scene of prophecy was shifted from earth to heaven. Its pages were filled with the description of the power of the God who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, his resources, his hosts, his anger,

his deliverance. In a word, we have the revelation of omnipotent might as a pledge and promise of victory, given to the people of God when their own strength was exhausted, their own hope had vanished, and their future was filled with the darkness of despair.

We understand now what the word "revelation" means. It does not mean a revelation of the future mysteries of the end of the world, the millennium or the Day of Judgment. Neither does it mean primarily a revelation of the glories of Heaven or the blessedness of the redeemed. Rather it means a revelation of the infinite God, mighty to save; an uncovering for the consolation and inspiration of God's people of the all-conquering powers of an omnipotent Saviour. Thus understood, the word Revelation or Apocalypse is used of all this type of prophetic literature.

It is not difficult, when the underlying idea of apocalyptic prophecy is grasped, to understand its style and vocabulary. The writer is endeavoring in each case to convey to the reader the impression of the irresistible resources of God marshalled to defend and to deliver his people. Evidently this impression can be best conveyed by the use of highly colored and pictorial language. Symbolism is thus of the very essence of apocalyptic thought. All of the seemingly fantastic imagery in this type of literature is simply the effort of the human mind to portray the resources of God on the one hand and of evil on the other. It is the description, so to speak, of celestial munition factories and of the mobilization of ethereal troops. While in part grotesque, it is in the main a grandiose effort of the human mind to portray in pictorial fashion the contending hosts of God and of Satan, of the beast and of the Lamb. Such was the meaning of the apocalypses in the Bible and out of it, which for five hundred years brought unbroken inspiration to the beleagured, defeated, discouraged and all but despairing children of God.

It should be remembered also that such symbolism is common in all literature outside of the Bible which aims at the

same result as these apocalyptic Bible books. Milton, for example, in his *Paradise Lost*, uses language that is closely akin to that of Daniel and Revelation. And we have a fine bit of apocalyptic writing in the Battle Hymn of the Republic:

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath  
are stored,  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift  
sword,  
His truth is marching on."

Whenever the human mind endeavors to portray the divine power and wrath in its onslaught upon sin and evil, this pictorial language will be used. It is the language of the second Psalm and of the sixty-third chapter of Isaiah.

It requires no argument to prove the inspiration of this kind of prophecy when its meaning is once understood. Often it is treated, even by serious Bible scholars, as prophecy in decline; as an inferior or second-rate kind of literature, not to be compared with the fine ethical chapters of Amos or Isaiah. It is often thought of as fantastic, grotesque, or even absurd. The tendency is to skip such chapters as representing a kind of Jewish thought which is wholly foreign to modern thinking and modern culture. More will be said about this in the next chapter. But here the essential and wonderful inspiration of apocalyptic prophecy must be insisted upon.

Its inspiration is seen first of all in its accommodation to the real needs of the people. There is something truly wonderful to the thoughtful Bible reader in the swift way in which prophecy makes itself over in the interest of the human soul. It cares nothing for itself; its sole concern is the spiritual needs of men. And, as we have seen, no kind of message was more calculated to meet such needs at the time these books were written than the very kind of message which they em-

body. Ethical exhortation was not then needed; therefore it was no longer used.

"I believe in the inspiration of the Bible," Coleridge once remarked, "because it inspires me." If we judge the inspiration of these apocalyptical books by this test, they become among the most inspired books in the Bible. It is not too much to say that at certain crisis hours in history, the books of Daniel and Revelation have saved for the world the faith of the Bible. These messages evoked such a response of heroic fortitude and endurance from the hearts of readers, that their resistance to evil became like adamant, and the faith of which they were the sole and apparently helpless defenders triumphed over what seemed insuperable odds. What, the historical student may well ask, would have become of the Bible faith had it not been for the flaming appeals of the apocalypses?

Finally the inspiration of these books is seen in the faith which they themselves enshrine. Whence came the assurance to these unknown writers that God was ready to act and ready to strike? How were they enabled to promise sure and speedy victory against every outward appearance and probability? How came they to know that deliverance had been provided and that salvation was near? Who caused them to see the counsels of the Eternal, and to reveal the infinite passion and power of an omnipotent Saviour? What made their hearts to be lifted up to a height far above even the most courageous and daring of their comrades? The answer to these questions rests in the spiritual region of what, for want of a better word, we call the inspiration of the human soul. It means, indeed, the very entering of the Spirit of God into the hearts of these men, enabling them to see what the eye of man could not see, to hear what ear had not heard, and to understand what otherwise would be impossible for the mind of man to conceive. From this point of view the apocalyptical writers become the most inspired of the prophets, and one finds one's heart warm with a new feeling of gratitude and

love for these men from whose souls, in the darkest hours of Bible history, there leaped forth the faith, the knowledge, the assurance which turned defeat into victory and brought life out of death:

“Thrice blest is he to whom is given  
The instinct that can tell  
That God is on the field when He  
Is most invisible.”

What has here been set down concerning apocalyptic literature as a whole may best be illustrated by a brief survey of the Book of Daniel. The Book of Revelation cannot be understood apart from the Book of Daniel. They are two parallel books. In each case the historical background is the same; the purpose is the same; the method is the same; and the result is the same. In order to understand the Book of Revelation it is necessary that we first understand the Book of Daniel.

The Book of Daniel is one of the most interesting and important books in the Bible. It pulses with human interest; it throbs with spiritual passion; it is full of dramatic spiritual appeal; it is wonderful in the faith it exhibits; and the lessons it teaches are of permanent and extraordinary value. Yet, like the Book of Revelation, it is a book that is all but neglected by the rank and file of Bible readers. For many people the first six chapters are all that they know of the book. These chapters contain the stories of the heroism of Daniel and his friends at Babylon. They are good hero-stories to be read to children, but Shadrach in the fiery furnace or Daniel in the lions' den do not convey an immortal truth to grown-up readers of the Bible. Another set of Bible students fastens on the last six chapters of the book. In these visions they seem to find a key to the mysteries of the future. Upon the basis of these chapters they figure out when the world will end, the Anti-Christ be destroyed, and the millen-



nium be ushered in. Yet neither of these is a worthy way of using one of the grandest books in the Old Testament.

The Book of Daniel brings us down to the very end of the Old Testament era. It brings us to the very threshold of New Testament times. It was probably the very latest of our Old Testament books. Its scene is not laid in Babylon in the time of the Exile at all, but in Palestine, only about two centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ. The period of Jewish history which called it into being was one of the most critical in all the chequered history of the Jewish people. Once more, and just before the Prince of Peace was to be born, the Hebrew faith was confronted with a trial so severe that its very existence was threatened. In the year 332 B.C. Persia was conquered by Alexander the Great, and the succeeding two centuries of Jewish history are known as the Greek period. Now the Greek invasion was unlike the Assyrian and the Babylonian invasion in this respect, that it was not an invasion of armies only, but of ideas as well. A force of intellect, an insidious culture, a permeating spirit foreign to the ideals of the Hebrew people, was brought to bear upon them with a pressure surpassing any that the Jews had hitherto known. The ancient empires had transplanted the nation to Assyria and Babylon; the Greeks brought Greece to Palestine. Israel was compassed and penetrated by an influence as subtle as the atmosphere, and found itself infected and altered beyond all powers of resistance. The policy of Alexander and his successors was to introduce the Greek language, Greek customs, Greek culture, in all conquered territories. Hellenism was in its very nature a permeating and transforming force. Little by little it made its way into the very heart and citadel of Hebrew life. The Hellenist Jews, comprising the priests and the aristocracy, began to speak the Greek language, adopt the Greek customs, frequent the Greek theatres, take over, in a word, the Greek culture. The very integrity of Hebrew faith and morals was threatened by this subtle and apparently irresistible invasion of Greek civilization and ideals.

Of course, it did not proceed without opposition. Over against the Hellenists who favored the new culture were the Chasidim, the conservatives, those faithful to the ancestral religion and to the faith of their fathers. Thus the issue was joined. How it would have ended had the policy of the peaceful penetration of Greek ideas proceeded it is impossible to state. Instead of this, the issue was suddenly forced in a most dramatic and unexpected manner.

About 198 B.C., a Syrian monarch known as Antiochus the Great finally succeeded in wresting Judæa from the control of Egypt. His son, Antiochus Epiphanes, the bright and shining one, came to the throne about twenty years later. He had long lived in Greece and was a devotee of everything Greek. One of his ambitions was to make the Greek language, the Greek literature and the Greek culture prevail all over the East. When Judæa became a part of his dominions, he determined to do away with the Jewish religion, and to substitute for the Sabbath and the Law and the God of the Jews, the altars and the sacrifices and the gods of Greece.

About the year 170 B.C., we come to the climax of one of the grandest epochs in the whole history of the Jews and to one of the turning points in the history of religion. Antiochus determined, in a word, not to wait for the gradual fulfilment of his plans, but to accomplish them at once by the use of force. A pagan altar was erected in Jerusalem, on the site of the Temple. Sacrifices were made to Zeus, the Temple was polluted, the people were compelled to take part in the pagan rites. They were ordered to disregard the Sabbath, to cease from reading the Law and the prophets, and death was the penalty for refusing to obey. Religious persecution had become a fact for the first time in Jewish history.

At first, Antiochus carried all before him. Many of the priests and most influential people went over to the Greeks. By fire and sword Jerusalem had been converted into a heathen



city. Then came resistance and the upleap of the Jewish spirit.

Twenty miles northwest of Jerusalem is the little town of Modin (or Modina). Here lived a pious Jew, Mattathias, and his five sons. When the soldiers came to enforce the rule regarding heathen sacrifices, Mattathias refused, killed the King's officer and a Jew who stepped forward to offer the sacrifices, fled with his sons to the mountains and called the people to war. Hundreds followed him and then, only about a century and a half before the birth of Christ, the last great war was fought to save the Jewish faith from destruction.

This war is known to history as the Maccabean war. It has been so called from the name given to the most famous of the sons of Mattathias, Judas, who became the military leader of the Jews, and one of the great generals of history. He was called Maccabeus, which means the Hammerer. With mere handfuls of soldiers compared with the hosts that Antiochus sent against him, he conducted a guerilla warfare with such skill and pertinacity that the Syrians were beaten off again and again, until, by a miracle as it seemed, Antiochus suddenly died. Judæa and all its precious heritage of faith was preserved unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by Him fulfilled into that faith which has been and is for all time the hope of mankind. Any one who wishes to read about this episode and about these wars may do so by opening his Old Testament Apocrypha and reading the first book of Maccabees. In spite of occasional errors, this book is authentic history, contains the main facts of this extraordinary epoch, and is of sustained and thrilling interest.

Now the Book of Daniel had for its purpose to enflame the patriotism and faith of the Jews in this life-and-death struggle, to nerve them to resistance, and to create in them the will to conquer. "If we would realize the greatness of the Book of Daniel, we should ask ourselves the question, What would have been the history of religion in the world, and what would have been our own religious condition if the effort

of Antiochus to extirpate Judaism had been successful, and then realize that the faith and hope which this book expresses . . . was the only thing that stood in the way of his success.”<sup>1</sup>

We do not know the author of the book. Like the Book of Jonah, it is one of the great anonymous books of the Old Testament. The author assumes the name of Daniel, which means “God is my Judge.” There may indeed have been a man named Daniel. In Ezekiel (14:14, 20; 28:3) a Daniel is mentioned with Noah and Job as a very righteous man and as an example of the highest wisdom. But we have no exact knowledge of him, and the author simply makes use of him and of the stories connected with him, to point his own moral lesson, and to create the moral enthusiasm demanded by the crisis which he had set himself to meet. He tells these stories as if they had taken place in the far away days of the Babylonian captivity. But his readers knew how to take them. They were flaming tracts for the times. “This book fell like a glowing spark from a clear Heaven upon a surface which was already intensely heated far and wide and waiting to burst into flames.” For a century or more prophecy had been dormant. Once more before the close of the Old Testament it leaps like flame from the lips of this inspired prophet.

We are now in a position to understand the message of this book. It falls into two parts: the first six chapters, which have to do with the stories of the heroism of Daniel; and the last six chapters which contain visions and predictions of the outcome of the struggle, the destruction of evil, and the triumph of the faithful.

Look for a moment at these stories in Daniel in the light of what has been said, and see what new and wonderful significance they assume for their time and for all time. Here is the story of how Daniel and his companions refused to defile themselves with the King’s meat. Its immediate object was to brace the Jews to refuse to eat the meat which Antiochus had commanded they should eat in order to break down Jew-

<sup>1</sup> Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

ish religious customs. Eating of such meat since the Exile had been regarded as a deadly sin. This story illustrates the blessing of faithfulness. In it young men in the midst of the solicitations and temptations of modern life can find the same inspiration which the Jews found, beset as they were by the royal decree.

Akin to this is the story in the third chapter of the burning and fiery furnace. "Regarded as an instance of the use of historic fiction to inculcate the noblest truths, the third chapter of Daniel is not only superb in its imaginative grandeur but still more in the manner in which it sets forth the inspired fidelity which is the essence of the most heroic and inspiring forms of martyrdom. So far from slighting it because it is not literal history, I have regarded it as one of the most precious among the narratives of the Bible, and of priceless value as illustrating the deliverance of undaunted faithfulness, and that God is the Saviour and Deliverer of those who trust in Him."<sup>1</sup> The Jews were in the furnace of affliction, but they were not to be afraid of it. Let them but answer as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered—one of the most magnificent passages in the Bible. President Hadley of Yale has said that he could never read these words without emotion:

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; but if it be not according to his plan, be it still known unto thee, O king, that we will not worship thy gods nor the golden image.  
(Dan. 3:17, 18.)

In this setting, the phrase "But if it be not" is one of the noblest in all literature.

And the fire had no power upon their bodies, nor was the hair of their head singed, nor had the smell of fire passed upon them, for there was with them in the furnace a fourth whose aspect was like unto the Son of God.  
(Dan. 3:27.)

<sup>1</sup> Dean Farrar, quoted in Daniel, Expositor's Bible.

What depth of inspiration for the day for which it was written! What a chapter for the martyrs of the day in which we live!

With these two must be linked the story of Daniel cast into the den of lions. The wicked are often called lions in the Old Testament. "My soul is among lions. Break the jaw-bones of the lions, O Lord." "They have cut off my life in the dungeon and cast a stone upon me." In the story, the Jews for whom it was written saw a true picture of themselves cast helpless in the midst of their ravenous foes, and in the deliverance which was Daniel's they saw the promise of their salvation from their enemies and from them that hated them. The truth of this chapter for its time and for all time is adapted to those who face persecution for righteousness' sake.

Besides these three stories of personal heroism are the three dreams, pictures of the destruction of the kingdom of evil. In the first dream the prophet sees a kingdom with head of gold, arms of silver, thighs of brass, and feet of iron, standing athwart the land and threatening to crush it. And there was a "stone not made with hands" that smote it.

Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold broken to pieces together and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors. (Dan. 2:35).

There was not a Jew who would not know that the kingdom of Antiochus was meant, and that the downfall of that colossus was prophesied by the impact of the rock of righteousness. Think of the inspiration which the story contained for these threatened Jews! Think back to the colossus of Germany which within our own memory stood apparently impregnable, "girt about with might," but was made like the chaff of summer threshing-floors by the impact of a stone not made with hands, by the force of righteous ideas.

In the second dream picture, the prosperity of the heathen kingdom is likened to a tree which grew and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto Heaven and the sight thereof

to the end of the earth. But a holy one came down from Heaven and hewed the tree to the ground. Naught but a stump was left:

Thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore—break off thy sins by righteousness and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor. (Dan. 4:26, 27.)

The meaning of this prophecy for its own day needs no comment, nor does its wonderful applicability to our day: no kingdom is sure until “they have known that the heavens do rule.”

The story of Belshazzar, with its oriental magnificence, has been made familiar to us in art. It is a true night-piece with all the colors of dissolute, extravagant riot, luxurious passion, growing madness, ruinous bewilderment, mysterious horror and terror of such a night of revelry and death. The description begins with a crashing overture, and it ends with the doom of judgment. The eloquence of it must have fired to white heat the religious enthusiasm of the Jews for whose inspiration it was written; to-day there are few passages in all literature to compare with it for its effect on the emotions. Considered as a judgment on the only oriental empire known to our times, the Turkish rule, it is fitting in nearly every detail. The words *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, fall like the sound of doom, the tolling of the bell of fate, upon the modern nations that have been weighed and found wanting.

If this, then, is the historical meaning and the everlasting inspiration of these stories contained in the first six chapters of Daniel, a word must be said about the visions and predictions contained in the last six chapters. Here we have the emergence of that new type of prophecy of which I have spoken. It tells men that, irresistible as their human foes may seem to be, the hosts of the Lord are mightier still, and nothing can withstand his might. Traces of this kind of prophecy are to be found, as we have seen, in all the literature after the Exile, but Daniel is the first book to make

exclusive use of it. Its entire message deals with what God will do for men; it speaks only of salvation and deliverance, and with its strange figures of speech and bizarre imagery, borrowed largely from Eastern mythology, it brings a powerful message of hope and victory. The point to be borne in mind, however, is that this prophecy in the book of Daniel is all focused on immediate historical events. The afflicted Jews in the time of the Maccabees were demanding an end of their troubles and deliverance from their persecution. That was what the book promised them. First of all, it described their enemies in the terms of beasts: one like a lion, one like an eagle, one like a bear, one like a leopard, with horns and heads, and teeth and hoofs—these are the heathen kingdoms. Over against them there is the host of the Lord, there is the Ancient of Days, there is the Son of Man, and there are the saints of the Most High. In chapter after chapter there is the promise:

Judgment shall be set; and the kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him. Here is an end of the matter. (Dan. 7:27.)

The inspiration of these chapters is two-fold: first, it lies in the fact that when the fortunes of the Hebrews were at their lowest, when it seemed as if nothing could save them, at such an hour the faith of this prophet rose supreme and he promised the Jews, battling for their faith against overwhelming odds, that judgment was to be visited upon the beast Antiochus and "they shall take away his kingdom to destroy and to consume it to the end." Even a time limit is set to his triumph. After three and a half years (a time, times and half a time) the people are to be delivered from their persecution. And indeed they were! How, in those dark days, came the prophet to have so confident a faith in the triumph of righteousness that was on the scaffold, and in the downfall of evil that was on the throne? In the answer to that question we touch a real inspiration in the Book of Daniel.



This matchless assurance that evil shall be conquered in the end, that the right shall ultimately prevail, remains the eternal inspiration of all righteous souls. The Book of Daniel was one of the favorite books of Jesus. There are more references to it in the records of his life than to almost any other Old Testament book. In the dark hours of his passion and struggle, when He came face to face with incarnate evil, when He sweat drops of blood in his agony to do away with the sin of the world, his soul hung upon this everlasting assurance that "upon the wing of abominations shall come one that maketh desolate and even unto the full end, and that determined, shall wrath be poured out upon the desolate." (Dan. 9:27, R. V.)

If Jesus needed the inspiration of these chapters, we need them too. They bid us, even in the darkest day, to trust the omnipotence of righteousness; they tell us that evil is marked for overthrow; that God's word is not to be mistrusted; that we must labor and endure in the faith which is so adequately expressed for us at the end of this wonderful book:

But go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end of the days. (Dan. 12:13.)

Any one who is at all familiar with the history of the Jewish people between the time of the Maccabees and the Book of Revelation—roughly speaking, between 100 B.C. and 100 A.D.—will not be surprised that this kind of apocalyptic literature flourished during this period. As we have seen, here is prophecy for dark and dismal hours, for people with their backs to the wall, desperate, defeated and all but despairing. Such was the outward condition of the Jewish people for these two hundred years. Delivered from the Syrians, the Jews fell into the clutches of Rome and, as every New Testament reader knows, they were ground under the iron heel of Roman oppression. The embers of revolt were constantly breaking out into the open flame of rebellion, until Rome determined to make an end of this seditious people.

That end came in the unparalleled and appalling disaster of the capture of Jerusalem by the Roman Emperor Titus in the year A.D. 70. The horrors of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem may be read in the history of Josephus. All through this dismal period the faith of the Jews was sustained by apocalyptical writings which are not a part of our canonical Scriptures. These offer a broad and a fascinating field for study.<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunate that they have not been gathered into a convenient volume for the general reader. Two of them (Ezra and Baruch) appear in the Old Testament Apocrypha. Others have been published in separate volumes (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London). A knowledge of these books is necessary for one who desires to understand the sources of the Book of Revelation, and the position which it occupies in the history of apocalyptical literature.

The most important of these non-canonical apocalypses is the Book of Enoch. It was written a little later than the Book of Daniel, and like Daniel is pseudonymous. It is composite, and contains several apocalypses which made their appearance during the two centuries before Christ. The first part of the book contains a series of visions, in which are described the impending destruction of evil, the triumph of righteousness, and the setting up of the Messianic kingdom.

The second of these visions consists of a series of parables or similitudes. These all treat of the Messianic age, and offer a basis for understanding the Messianic consciousness of Christ. In them are described the future abodes of the righteous, the punishment reserved for sinners, the sufferings of God's servants in their resistance to evil, and the final judgments to be enacted by the Messiah. A third division of Enoch gives us information about the heavenly bodies, and still another describes the whole course of human history to

<sup>1</sup> The Standard work is R. H. Charles' *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford 1913). A brief review of the most important of these apocalypses will be found in Case, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 75-124, and Porter, *op. cit.*, pp. 293-356. See also Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*, *Apocalyptic Literature*, and *Apocrypha*.



the end of the world. Doubtless this book was familiar to the author of Revelation (see Jude 14), and it contains all of the familiar ideas of our Apocalypse: the necessity for faithful endurance, the trials of God's servants, the terrors of the last times, the sure triumph of righteousness, the punishment of the wicked, and the glories of the Messianic age.

Early in the Christian era appeared *The Assumption of Moses*, the purpose of which was to encourage trust in religious ideals rather than in political action while awaiting the salvation that God was sure to send to his people. A little later appeared *The Secrets of Enoch*. God is described as revealing to Enoch the secrets of Heaven and of Hades. He is also told that at the end of seven thousand years a new and eternal world is to appear, which is now imminent.

The fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 gave rise to two important Jewish apocalypses, both of which are found in our Old Testament Apocrypha, *Baruch* and *Ezra* (II *Esdras*). The first of these purports to have been written by Jeremiah's scribe. The purpose of the real author, however, is to admonish the faithful to endure in the face of all trials, since in his own time God will come to them with a glorious reward, and will give terrible punishment to their enemies. In the book of *Ezra*, the question is asked why God should permit his people to suffer so severely. The answer to this question is given to *Ezra* by an angel, and contains the familiar apocalyptic assurance of the care of God for his people, the impending end, the punishment of sinners, and the new creation with the glories of the heavenly Jerusalem. A careful reading of this book, which is easily accessible (*O. T. Apocrypha II Esdras*), will reveal many of the features of the New Testament Apocalypse.

There are a few Christian apocalypses which made their appearance subsequent to the writing of our Revelation. The most important of these are *The Shepherd of Hermas*, and *The Apocalypse of Peter*. It seems reasonably clear that both books were in existence as early as 150 A.D. *Hermas*

receives revelations of wisdom in the form of addresses which he is instructed to pass on to his fellow-Christians. These addresses contain information about the church, the impending catastrophe, and the virtues which Christians should possess. The Apocalypse of Peter has great historical significance since it is the prototype of that kind of literature of which the writings of Dante are the most famous example. This Apocalypse is only a fragment, and its chief purpose is to portray in detail the future blessings of the righteous and the torments of the wicked. The special tortures of murderers, blasphemers, the worldly and the persecutors of Christians are successfully described. The Book of Revelation contains only the beginnings of such speculation which, through this later Apocalypse, became one of the familiar themes of later mediæval church literature.

Such then, in briefest outline, is the history of apocalyptic prophecy to which the Book of Revelation belongs. It is the great Christian Apocalypse. Like all apocalyptic literature, it was written at a time when faith was tested, when evil was regnant, when God's people were threatened by suffering and by death. Here we have the cry of the Christian heart tortured by the pressure of the Pagan Empire. Falling back on that form of prophecy that was so familiar, so saturated with all kinds of national and religious sentiment, which had already vindicated itself more than once in the history of God's people, John, carried away in the spirit, beheld the Apocalypse, the Omnipotent God, the Lamb that was slain, sitting upon the throne and crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ETHICAL VALUE OF APOCALYPTICAL PROPHECY

**I**T is important to remember that the apocalypses of the Old Testament were reflected in the teachings of Jesus. They were not reckoned by Him to be a negligible or secondary element in Old Testament inspiration. Apocalyptic thought is seen to be a fundamental and permanent element in his teaching. If we can discover the reason for this, we shall discover also the place which the apocalyptic ideas should have in the thought of all Christians.

Every reader of the Gospels is aware that they contain two kinds of language, and two types of thought. On the one hand, there is the simple ethical teaching of Jesus as found in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Parables, and in the chapters of the Fourth Gospel. In these familiar portions of the Gospel we are taught about God's love for men, about man's duty to God and to his fellow-men, and about the nature of the kingdom of heaven. But there is another kind of teaching, found chiefly at the end of each of the four Gospels, in which Jesus discourses about the end of the world, the judgment, the resurrection of the just, the condemnation of the wicked, and the coming of the Son of Man in power and great glory.

To most Bible readers these chapters have seemed strange and unintelligible, quite foreign to the words of the meek and loving Jesus; a rather unwelcome and mysterious addition, as it were, to the familiar sayings of Christ. Many Bible readers, if they were to speak their minds, would be rather relieved if the teaching of Jesus were free from this apocalyptic-

cal language. Frankly, they are not at home in it, do not read it, and do not know what to do with it. What relation has the parable of the prodigal son to such words as these at the close of the same Gospel (Luke 21:25-27):

And there shall be signs in the sun and the moon and in the stars; . . . the sea and the waves roaring, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

The average Bible reader is not the only one to be perplexed by this contrast in the teachings of Jesus. Scholars have been baffled by it also. Of late years, an exhaustive study of the subject has been made. No portion of the Gospels has been scrutinized with more care than the apocalyptic element. Out of this study, four general positions have emerged, which may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. It has been thought that these teachings are a kind of Jewish excrecence upon the pure, original Gospel of Christ Himself, that they are not a part of that original Gospel at all, that they were carried over from the Old Testament by the early Christian writers whose minds were full of this Jewish teaching, and grafted on the teaching of Christ Himself which was, in its original form, innocent of any such thought and language. The apocalyptic element in the Gospels is thus thought to be a Jewish gloss foisted upon the narrative by Jewish influences, the pure Gospel being adulterated by a foreign admixture of Jewish ideas.

The trouble with this theory is that it runs counter to the judgment of the best scholars of the text of the New Testament. Those scholars now tell us that the apocalyptic sayings of Christ are as well attested as his simple ethical teachings. While there may be some intermingling of Jewish elements in the Gospels, there is nothing to show that the apocalyptic ideas are not an original part of the teachings of Jesus. They cannot be stricken out of the Gospels as alien and spurious additions to it.

2. A second theory is that these teachings in the Gospels

are the exaggeration of a later age. Our Gospels, as we know, are not a verbatim and contemporary record of the sayings of Jesus. They are a recollection of those sayings as they passed through the minds of the evangelists who later set them forth orally and in writing. Thus they are tinged and colored by the thought of the evangelists and by the atmosphere of a later time. Since the Gospels were written about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, or shortly after, it is natural to suppose that that great catastrophe influenced the thought of those who reported the utterances of Jesus. Those utterances, as we know, remained a fluid tradition for nearly a generation before being put into a fixed form. During that time they were susceptible to outside influences and an unconscious infiltration of extraneous elements. These apocalyptic ideas crept into the reported teaching of Jesus during this period of fluidity. Doubtless there were some of his sayings which lent themselves to such an interpretation, and the later Christian consciousness made explicit, in an exaggerated form, what was at the most merely implicit in the teaching of Jesus.

The answer to this is, that there must have been at least some solid foundation for these portions of the Gospels, since they attained the strength and the dimensions which they exhibit in all of our four Gospels and elsewhere in the New Testament. We have in the New Testament no less than seven different presentations of the faith of the primitive Christians, viz.: the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), the Fourth Gospel, Paul, Hebrews, James, Peter and Revelation. In all of them the apocalyptic element is prominent. It is an accepted principle in New Testament interpretation, that what is common to *all* presentations of the Gospel teaching goes back to the teaching of Christ Himself. The application of this principle proves that the apocalyptic teaching belongs to Christ, if it proves anything at all. The evidence shows that if that teaching were influenced at all by later thought, it was softened rather than sharpened as time

went on. It goes back to the very first days of the church's history. It leaps as by instinct from the lips of the New Testament preachers. It must, therefore, have behind it the authority of Christ Himself.

3. A third view accepts these sayings as an undoubted genuine part of the teaching of Christ, but insists that they are an unimportant part of that teaching. Jesus was a Jew. He inherited the Jewish ideas, and the Jewish teaching was a part of his human consciousness. He was a child of his age, and He did not escape from the Jewish categories of thought. Thus the survival of the apocalyptical ideas is a proof, according to the exponents of this theory, of the way in which He emptied Himself into the human life of his time. The apocalyptical thought survives as a relic of old Judaism and must be regarded as an anachronism in the teachings of Jesus to which little attention need be paid and in which little value will be found.

The difficulty here lies in the fact that this teaching grows in intensity and in fullness and power as the life of Christ progresses. If it were an inheritance truly foreign to Himself and to his mission, we should expect to find it in abundance at the beginning of his teaching, but falling more and more into the background as that teaching developed according to its own principles and purposes. But precisely the opposite is the case. The apocalyptical ideas are indeed to be found all through the Gospels. "Little Apocalypses" (as for example in Lk. 10:18; Matt. 8:11, 12) keep occurring. But it is as his ministry approaches its climax that this teaching increases in extent and in power. It is in the shadow of the Cross itself that it rises to its height. How then can it be considered a negligible or unimportant or valueless part of his teaching? The evidence goes to show that on the contrary it was an outstanding part of the Gospel as Jesus felt it and taught it.

4. So convincing has this argument seemed to many modern scholars that they have not hesitated to declare that



the apocalyptic element in the Gospels is the original core of that Gospel, and that in its light the whole teaching and outlook and mission of Christ must be understood and explained. The apocalypse of Jesus, in a word, and not the ethics of Jesus, constitutes the real Gospel. For this strange and unwelcome conclusion, conservative Bible students are in part responsible, in so far as they have insisted upon the impossibility of reconciling the ethical and apocalyptic teachings as parts of one and the same Gospel. Those who have been unwilling to accept the apocalyptic teachings of Christ on a par and level with his familiar ethical teachings, have pointed out that the two are mutually contradictory. And this contradiction, they have argued, goes deeper than language and form of thought. It involves the very essence of the Gospel itself. On the one hand we have the fact of the incarnation, God in man, Christ uttering the truth of God in his teachings concerning God and man. When this was done, the kingdom of God had in a true sense already come. Out of this inspiration, the kingdom of heaven would gradually develop as the tree from the grain of mustard seed. When the sower had sown the seed, redemption had indeed been wrought. Quite contrary to this, however—so runs this argument—is the apocalyptic idea in the Gospels. According to this, the kingdom of heaven had not come with the earthly career of Jesus. His Messiahship would not be proved and recognized until his return upon the clouds of heaven. Not until the Son of Man should come with power and great glory, not in the weakness of the manger but in the triumph of the apocalypse, would his Messiahship be vindicated and his kingdom be set up on earth. It has been urged that both of these conceptions, the ethical and the apocalyptic, cannot be true. One or the other must represent the message and mission of Christ.

Accepting this conclusion, a certain set of influential scholars, led by Albert Schweitzer, whose book, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus," 1910, is the most complete statement of this

view, has argued that the apocalyptic conception is the real and original Gospel; and that the apocalyptic hope was that which, from the first, animated and inspired Christ and was the secret of his inspiration and the source of his Social Hope for the world. It was upon this revelation that his heart was set from the first, the ethical teachings constituting only a preliminary and preparatory and temporary labor, until the consummation should appear. This generation was not to pass away until these things were fulfilled. Some standing there were not to taste death until they should see the Son of Man coming in glory. It was the apocalyptic vision that was the inner inspiration of Jesus all through his ministry, an inspiration inherited from the most spiritual of the prophets who had most immediately preceded Him and passed on by Him to his followers. The Cross was to Jesus the crucifixion of these hopes, and constituted the bitterness of his cup and the agony of his soul.<sup>1</sup>

Into a criticism of this view it is not our purpose to go. Doubtless it clears up certain difficulties, explains certain well-attested sayings of Christ which otherwise seem very obscure, and presents us with a clear and intelligible story of the progress of his thought and consciousness. But it runs counter to what may be called the normal Christian consciousness. It may satisfy intellectually and even spiritually a certain company of admittedly able and devout scholars, but it does not and will not satisfy the instinct of the instructed Christian heart. It not only does not offer men the Christ whom they want, but it does not present them with the whole Christ of the Gospels. An interpretation which puts the whole ethical teaching of Christ in the background, makes a subordinate if not a negligible fact of the Incarnation, and makes the Cross the symbol of a divine disappointment instead of a divine consummation, will never win the loyal allegiance of more than a small group of Christian thinkers.

<sup>1</sup>The reader will refer to London Theological Studies, H. T. Andrews, "The Eschatological Utterances of Jesus," and to D. S. Cairns, *op. cit.*, Chap. IV, "Jesus and the Kingdom of God."



For the majority of Christians, the chief value of all this apocalyptic explication of the Gospels is a vindication of it as a real and permanent and fundamental element in the total thought and message of Christ.

If, then, no one of these four views can be accepted, what interpretation can be offered which will include both the ethical and apocalyptic ideas and unite them in a comprehensible and intelligible whole? The answer to this question is not nearly so difficult as it has been made to appear. Careful thought will show that not only can they be united, but that they are both necessary to the complete thought and teaching of Christ, and that both are needed in the thinking and experience of a true follower of Christ and a true worker for Christ.

We have already seen what is the innermost meaning of all the Jewish apocalypses. It was the Jewish way of expressing faith and hope in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Always that idea lies at the root and center of an apocalypse, wherever found. That idea Jesus had inherited; it had become a part of his spiritual experience. He was familiar with the vocabulary of the apocalypse, that literary vehicle in which this fundamental idea was transmitted to the Hebrew mind and consciousness. This inspiration, then, and the form in which it was expressed and uttered, formed a part of that equipment which Jesus received from his human heritage. With it, He began his ministry.

At first, however, slight use was made of it. Doubtless the Gospels give us an accurate sequence here. That ministry begins with the teaching of his disciples and of the people, and with the healing of the bodies and souls of men. Only occasionally do we have a flash of the apocalyptic vision, as when He sees Satan falling like lightning from Heaven, or declares in the parable of the tares that evil at the last will be destroyed by fire. But as Jesus advances in the proclamation of his new kingdom, it becomes increasingly apparent that against it are to be arrayed the kingdoms and

powers of this world. "Now is my soul troubled." (John 12:27.) The shadow of the Cross begins to fall across his pathway, and He sets his face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem. Sharper and sharper becomes the contrast between good and evil. On the one hand there is his handful of disciples, themselves ignorant and feeble, and Himself, despised and rejected of men, and on the other hand, the more deeply He penetrates into the meaning of his ministry and of the work of the redemption and salvation of the world, the more definite become the two contrasting kingdoms—the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of heaven. The more heavily the kingdom of this world threatens to crush Christ, who not only preached but in his own person typified the kingdom of heaven, the more insistently there falls from his lips the apocalyptic teaching that one day the kingdom of heaven will be set up in this world, and He, the prince of righteousness, will sit upon the throne. In part, this teaching was projected into the future, and Christ saw and proclaimed that distant advent, the precise day and hour of which He, Himself, did not know, but the Father only, when He would reappear in power and great glory. But again, this teaching was concentrated upon the present hour, and Christ saw and proclaimed that with the completion of his work, with his own death and resurrection, that far-off and ultimate triumph was already potentially achieved. This world was judged, its kingdom was already overthrown, and the Son of Man was already come. Without doubt He pointed to the Temple and declared that within that generation not one stone should stand upon another. Without doubt He declared that soon Jerusalem would be hedged in with heathen armies, as in the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah. But surely we may say that what really preoccupied the mind of Jesus was not a series of probable or even certain historical and political events, but rather the certainty that He had from his Father that if his days were numbered, so also were those of the nation and of the system that were casting Him forth. Through Jesus

Christ, God had made Himself felt as a fact upon Jerusalem. The moral judgment typified and personified in the Son of Man was speedily to fall upon that city and upon that nation. That was the "time of the visitation" of Jerusalem. "Out of all the many days, there had been one day on which the challenge of eternity had been concentrated. The pressure of an eternal judgment had been brought to bear upon the Holy City through the immediate presence of the Son of Man. It had been brought under the scrutiny of the Eternal and had delivered the verdict which was its condemnation. And all this had come so suddenly that Jerusalem was not aware of what it had done." It was not in any sense prepared for the time of its visitation. How real and vital, thus understood, becomes the message of Jesus to his disciples:

Therefore be ye ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. (Matt. 24:44.)

Far from its being the truth that this teaching of Jesus is a Jewish survival, or an element of weakness in his moral outlook, what we really discover is that it is a necessary supplement to his explicit moral and religious teaching.

"When death drew near and the shadow of the Cross fell upon Him, conscious that as yet He had been unable to give the spiritual riches of the kingdom of God full expression, . . . and that his brief life was about to end, his earthly work forever to be closed, He flung the reserved elements of his teaching into symbolic form, and making use of the current and familiar imagery of the Jewish Apocalypse, He uttered these great and terrible closing words about his second coming."<sup>1</sup>

It is as if He had said: "Hitherto I have been among you in obscurity and weakness: I am now about to go away; but I shall come again in glory and power to judge the world and to bring in the kingdom of God." Obscurity there may be—allusions that are not easy to explain or even to

<sup>1</sup> See Cairns, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

understand—a language with whose very vocabulary and imagery we are not familiar; but brushing these all aside the main intention is plain: that just as there had been an advent in weakness, so there should be an advent in power; just as He had come into this world sharing the limitations of our humanity, so one day He would come with the infinite prerogatives of ruler and judge: just as one day He had put Himself at the mercy of men, so one day men would be at the mercy of Him who would be judge of both the quick and the dead. He was indeed going away, He said, but only to a higher vantage ground from which He would exert a far more powerful influence upon them and upon the world than when He was with them in the flesh. And He would still be the instrument of God in all the coming convulsions of nature and history through which mankind will be judged and the kingdom will come, just as He had under lowlier conditions been the Father's instrument in succoring them in the storm upon the lake, in feeding them with heavenly food, and in washing their travel-stained feet.

The real meaning of the apocalyptic teaching of Jesus, then, is his claim to be the rightful Lord of the entire world; is his solemn assurance that though He might seem to be leaving the world in humility and shame, the hour was advancing when that kingdom which He had come to found, which thus far had found its lodgment only in the hearts of a few Galilean peasants, would manifest its true character in the great spheres of the world's life; when He, who was born in a manger and was about to be spat upon, beaten and crucified, would reappear as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. When that reappearance should be, how it should come to pass—these are questions secondary to this magnificent proclamation of the coming of the kingdom and the coming of the King.

From this point of view, the apocalyptic teaching has a true and permanent place in the message of Jesus. Neither ethics nor apocalypse excludes the other; neither is subordi-

nate; and each is necessary to complete the whole. The ethical message of Jesus would be incomplete without this vision and solemn announcement of the ultimate overthrow of evil and the triumph of righteousness. Doubtless this truth was conveyed in language which to us may seem unintelligible and unfamiliar; but underneath it all, and running through it all, and not forgetting the full reach and meaning of it all, runs this sure conviction of the ultimate triumph of the truth which He, a humble rabbi, a lover of men, an itinerant preacher, had put in the hearts of his disciples and of those who had ears to hear. That truth was destined one day to overturn the world and usher in the kingdom of God.

The same importance is given to the apocalypse in the teaching of St. Paul. Is it possible to imagine Paul without the apocalyptic hope? He travels about the Roman Empire with the light of the Gospel shining in his soul. He plants little Christian colonies and instructs his disciples to be kind, loving, forgiving, pure, earnest and faithful. Then he looks about him and what does he see? He sees the whole Roman Empire in its vast power and in its impregnable sin.<sup>1</sup> "As he goes forward seeking to subdue the whole world for Christ, he becomes aware that while to a certain extent the world can be impressed by the Gospel, there is a whole social order of untouched wrongs and cruelties that he cannot touch, evils that are wholly against the mind of Christ, but that he cannot touch or alter. Hoary institutions like slavery, state paganism and the murderous gladiatorial games—what could he do to destroy them? But one thing he could do. He could set himself to win converts out of the heathen world; he could plant in the hearts of men and of women the love and fear of Jesus Christ; he could organize them into churches. And for the rest? There was the great hope; there was the great assurance—the Lord would come. Once He had come in weakness; the next time He would come in power and in glory, and Emperor and Sanhedrin would own Him alike."

<sup>1</sup> Cairns, *ibid.*, p. 213.



Then cometh the end when he . . . shall have put down all rule and all authority and all power. For he must reign till he hath put down all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (I Cor. 15:24, 25, 26.)

Do you think St. Paul could have lived without the apocalyptic hope? Do you think even his courage would have survived despair without the knowledge that the Captain of his salvation would one day reassume command and lead his hosts to victory? Do you imagine that he found this teaching that is "foreign to the serious culture of our time," foreign to his own life or without its message to his own soul? Was it unimportant or unnecessary, or was it the very bread of life on which his soul fed and drew its daily help and strength?

And now we come to the end of the Bible. The story of creation and redemption has been told. The full truth that one day shall make all men free has been uttered by Christ and interpreted by his inspired disciples. There is nothing more to be said that is essential to the personal and social salvation of all mankind. There stretch out the long and apparently unending centuries of sin and strife, of crime and injustice, of shame and war and inhumanity, of tears and savage bloodshed. What shall be the fate of the Gospel in such a history? How shall the idealism of Jesus fare in such a world? What shall the outcome be in this gigantic struggle between God and Satan, Christ and Cæsar, the Host of Heaven and the Armies of the Aliens?

Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I, John, . . . was in the spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. (Rev. 1:5-11.)

The Apocalypse with which the Bible closes is thus the divine proclamation of the ultimate victory of God's truth in

spite of all the contradiction and opposition of the ages. In no more inspired way could God's inspired Book have come to its close.

In the same way every Christian who bears the Gospel truth in his heart needs the apocalyptic hope. The ethics of Jesus will not suffice. We must share in his vision of the final overthrow of Satan and the coming of the Son of Man. Without such a hope, days will come when the powers of darkness will seem so overwhelming, the forces of evil so irresistible and impregnable that we will cease to believe in their ultimate destruction. Our hearts will grow weary, our arms will grow weak, our courage will become faint. If in such an hour we can fall back upon and be sustained by this inspiration which has fired the hearts of the apostles and martyrs, we will chant in the very face of the evil that threatens to destroy us:

“But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;  
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
The King of Glory passes on his way;  
Alleluia!”

## CHAPTER IV

### OUTLINE AND CONTENTS

THE Book of Revelation is not a series of disjointed chapters and disconnected visions. It is a carefully constructed drama, arranged to produce the maximum effect. No book in the Bible betrays more literary skill, a surer dramatic instinct, or possesses greater unity of design and artistic structure. Our study of it proceeds upon the assumption that, in the main, it is the work of a single author, and that this author has a plan of composition that runs through it from beginning to end. Both of these statements are questioned by many Bible students who point out that the Jewish apocalypses are, with the exception of the Book of Daniel, compilations from various sources, without unity of authorship or design. In the same way the art and unity of the Book of Revelation have been denied; and it has been held that no consecutive plan of composition can successfully be worked out.

This position is a possible one, and the matter of the unity of certain portions of the book is still an open one with Bible students. But to the mind of many, of whom the writer of the present study of the Book of Revelation is one, the unity of both authorship and plan is clear; and it can safely be said that no conclusive argument against it has so far been made.<sup>1</sup> We proceed to our examination of its contents, then, upon the assumption that the book is the single work of a single inspired writer. The following outline will indicate, in a general way, its plan and structure:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the whole subject, see Beckwith, pp. 216ff.

<sup>2</sup> This outline is not closely followed in the succeeding chapters. It will, however, enable the reader to grasp clearly the main argument of the book and the course of its development.



I. *Introduction.* Chapter 1:1-3.

Statement of the subject and author, and exhortation to the readers of the book.

II. *Greeting.* Chapter 1:4-8.

A salutation to the churches, and an ascription to Christ.

III. *The Prophet's Commission.* Chapter 1:9-20.

A vision in which the prophet receives his commission from the risen and glorified Christ.

IV. *Messages to the Churches.* Chapters 2-3.

Introductory exhortations, commendations, and warnings to the seven churches of Asia typical of all churches then and now.

V. *Visions of God and of Christ.* Chapters 4-5.

The infinite God and the omnipotent Christ who form the eternal background of the whole drama of the war between good and evil.

VI. *The Opening of the Seals of the Book.* Chapter 6.

A vision of the destruction which God will bring upon the world.

VII. *The Salvation of the Faithful.* Chapter 7.

A heavenly interlude of comfort and hope.

VIII. *The Sounding of the Trumpets.* Chapters 8-9.

The second judgments of God on the world, by nature, war, pestilence, famine and death.

IX. *A Pause before the Last Judgments.* Chapters 10-11:1-13.

1. The prophet's new commission. Chapter 10.
2. The safety and reward of the faithful. Chapter 11:1-13.

X. *Preparation for the Final Conflict.* Chapters 11:14-14:1-20.

1. An anthem of praise for God's approaching victory. Chapter 11:14-19.
2. The powers of evil in array. Chapters 12-13.
  - a. Satan. Chapter 12.
  - b. Rome. Chapter 13.
3. The opposing host of Christ and his Saints. Chapter 14:1-5.
4. Warnings to flee from the wrath to come. Chapter 14:6-20.

XI. *The Last Judgments.* Chapters 15-20.

1. Vision of the wrath of God in seven bowls, Chapters 15, 16.
2. The Fall of Rome. Chapters 17, 18, 19:1-5.
3. The Victory of Christ. Chapter 19:6-21.
4. The Fall of Satan. Chapter 20:1-10.
5. The General Resurrection. Chapters 20:11-25.

XII. *The Heavenly City.* Chapters 21, 22:1-5.

XIII. *The Epilogue.* Chapters 22:6-21.

A careful examination of this outline will reveal the artistic and dramatic structure of the book and the skill and effectiveness with which it develops its theme. There is first the solemn introduction, with its blessing upon all who hear and keep the words of this prophecy. This is followed by the salutation in the form made familiar in the letters of St.

Paul, with its eloquent ascription to Christ. The author then tells how he was commissioned to write the book. In a vision he sees the omnipotent Christ who is described in the language of Ezekiel and Daniel and Zachariah, and who commands the prophet to write the things which he has seen to the seven churches of Asia.

These chapters, which contain the messages to the churches, are among the most familiar in the book. With their reiterated refrain of promise to him that overcometh, they are constructed with singular literary skill and spiritual eloquence. In spite of local allusions, their main message is still applicable to the church at any period of trials, worldliness or apostasy. Before revealing the powers of evil and the judgments of God upon them, the writer then proceeds in two magnificent chapters to give us the eternal background, as it were, against which all of the coming drama is to be enacted (chapters 4 and 5). A sense of assurance and permanence is at once created in the hearts of his readers. It is as if before portraying scenes of great trial and suffering the words were set down:

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. (Matt. 24:35.)

Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid:

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day and forever. (I Cor. 3:11, Heb. 13:8.)

A door is opened and the seer passes through it and sees God upon his throne, the Ancient of Days who sitteth throned in glory, surrounded by the elders, and by all the heavenly host who worship Him day and night, saying:

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power. (Rev. 4:11.)

The prophet observes that God holds a book in his right hand, a roll sealed with seven seals. "It is the book of human destiny." Christ alone is worthy to break the seals of the roll

and to reveal the future. He is the Lamb that has been slain. "Amid choruses of praise which accompany the action through the whole work like the lyric choruses of a Greek tragedy,"<sup>1</sup> the Lamb takes the book and one by one breaks the seven seals. The visions of the future begin.

The opening of the seals of the book is a pictorial way of describing the judgments of God upon an evil world, which, for the author, is represented by the Roman Empire. The four horses with their riders typify this punishment in its various forms as conquest, war, famine and pestilence. At the fifth seal, the souls of the martyrs cry for vengeance. When the sixth seal is broken we have great convulsions of nature (chapter 6).

Before the seventh seal is broken, however, we have an interruption. These chapters, we need to remember, are written to Christians who may already have suffered martyrdom, and for whom persecution is still in store. With a touch of spiritual genius, a passage of consolation and inspiration is inserted before the final woe is pronounced. In the familiar seventh chapter a promise of immortality is given to all those not only of the household of Israel but of all nations and kindreds who have come victoriously through tribulation into the blessedness of the redeemed.

The seventh seal is then opened. But instead of bringing the end, it introduces a new series of seven, the seven blasts of trumpets (chapters 8 and 9). By this literary device, the author succeeds in his purpose of suggesting a long panorama of events, an indefinite period of trial, and the obstinate resistance of evil. It is to be no short struggle. Victory is not to be won by a brief campaign. These two chapters are given to a description, highly colored with apocalyptic imagery, of the judgments following the sounding of six trumpets. Again we await the consummation with the sounding of the seventh trumpet; but once more the end is delayed. The climax is to be still more portentous.

<sup>1</sup> See J. H. Ropes, *Harvard Theological Review*, Oct. 1919, p. 419.

The effect is further increased by what follows before the sounding of the last trumpet. The prophet receives a fresh commission as if he needed to be still further equipped for the task that remains (chapter 10). Once more comes the assurance that the faithful shall be preserved and that their witness cannot be destroyed. Vast celestial preparations are made for the impending and final conflict. A pæan of praise is sung to God (chapter 11); the forces of the enemy are set in array, the apparently irresistible forces of Satan and of the Roman Empire (chapters 12 and 13). Over against these are marshalled the Lamb and the hundred and forty and four thousand of his saints; and a warning goes forth from the lips of angels to all upon the earth: "Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come" (chapter 14).

This final judgment is pictured to us in the emptying of seven bowls, such as were used for pouring libations at an altar. The wrath of God is poured out upon a wicked world (chapters 15, 16); the great and terrible day of the Lord is come.

And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven . . . saying, It is done . . . and great Babylon came in remembrance before God to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. (Rev. 16:17, 19.)

In lurid language and with an unparalleled eloquence of spiritual emotion and triumph the downfall of Rome is portrayed for us, with all her luxury and glory and pride (chapters 17, 18):

Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her . . . And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all that were slain upon the earth. (Rev. 18:20, 24.)

The destruction of Rome is followed by a chorus of praise, as a multitude chants with the voice of many waters:

Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. (Rev. 19:6.)

The Messiah has come, King of Kings and Lord of Lords (chapter 19). And the victory of the Lamb means not only the fall of Rome but the final defeat of Satan, who may indeed break loose again for a while but shall eventually be

cast into the lake of fire and brimstone . . . and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rev. 20:10.)

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, and the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. (Rev. 21:1.)

So beautifully begins the closing chapters of the book, with a sweet strain of heavenly harmony after the thunders and lightnings, the earthquakes and judgments of the barbaric descriptions of the destruction of evil in the preceding chapters. It is like listening to a pastoral symphony after hearing the tumult of brass instruments and cymbals and kettle-drums in the thunder of the orchestra. This is followed by the familiar description of the Heavenly City, the salvation of the saints, and eternal joy of those who have been faithful unto death.

Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so come Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20, 21.)

Such is the Book of Revelation. It is an Apocalypse describing for the Christians of the day in which it was written the sure destruction of Rome by the armies of God and the power of Christ. It is an exhortation to endure, to be patient and steadfast in the sure knowledge that victory has been prepared for them. The book contains untold inspiration for all Christians in that it contains the great Social Hope without which they cannot be faithful unto death and so receive the crown of life.

## CHAPTER V

### THE INTRODUCTION AND THE MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES

#### *Revelation, Chapters 1-3.*

WE do not know who is the author of the Book of Revelation. The traditional view is that he was the Apostle John, the supposed author of the Fourth Gospel. Scholars are, however, agreed that the author of the Fourth Gospel and of the Book of Revelation cannot be the same person. The difference in style and in religious conceptions is too great, and the supposed similarities are too slight. Neither is there anything to prove that the author was the Apostle John. There is no claim anywhere in the book of apostolic authorship. There are no personal references in it. The writer nowhere indicates that he had known the historic Jesus, and the pictures of Christ are different from those which would have been drawn by one who had been associated with Him in his earthly ministry.

All that we know of the author is that he gives his name as John and that he was contemporary to the events which he describes, and a brother and fellow in trial of those to whom he writes.

#### CHAPTER I

1. The *Superscription* (1:1-3) with which the first chapter opens is a solemn introduction to the whole book. The real author of the book, we are told, is Christ, who receives the revelation which is to follow from God and communicates it through an angel to John. The revelation is the authoritative word of God. Those to whom it is written are ex-



horted to give heed to it, to listen attentively to these prophecies since they tell of impending events, of things which are to happen without delay. In this section, brief as it is, there are spiritual lessons of much meaning. First, the Bible and the whole Gospel message is an authoritative revelation. Our whole attitude toward Christianity is much weakened if we think of it as a system of thought rather than as a true revelation of God. How much our Christian thinking would be strengthened if we would preface it with this superscription! Put these words above your creed and see if it is not ennobled thereby. Second, God makes one man the channel of his communication to other men. This channel is never closed, and there is likely to be given to any of God's children a special message of which he is the chosen mouthpiece. How much our religious lives are enriched by this idea in their relation both to God and to our fellowmen! Third, John "bare record." He faithfully reproduced what had been communicated to him. There was no loss in transmission. What he received, he gave. This fidelity in the stewardship of spiritual gifts is insisted upon both in the Gospels and in the Epistles. To-day a chief cause of the lack of religious interest is the ineffective and unconvincing lives of Christian people. How much it would mean if every disciple of Christ should "witness" in such a way as faithfully to reproduce the Gospel in his life! Fourth, the book is to be read, we are told, because of impending events. "The times are at hand." These words are important as indicating that the book is focused upon immediate historical events and is not concerned with distant millennial happenings. Just so in our own lives, this book should be used not as a guide to mysterious events in the future, but as a practical inspiration for immediate trials of our faith and patience. A blessing awaits the devout mind which receives and observes the prophecies of this book.

Chapter 1:1. This is the Revelation of Christ Himself, who received it from God that He might disclose to his



servants what is about to happen. Through an angel, Jesus communicated this revelation to John, 2. who transmitted faithfully all things that he saw. 3. Blessed the man who reads and hears and lays to heart what is here recorded, for the time is come when it shall be fulfilled.

*Notes v. 1* **Revelation** used only in the New Testament in the sense of an unfolding of future events. For other uses, see Lk. 12:2; Rom. 8:19, 16:25; Gal. 1:12; II Thess. 2:8. The full name **Jesus Christ** used only in this chapter (and 22:21). Elsewhere Jesus is used. **Shortly come to pass** i.e., the book deals with contemporary and not with mediæval or modern history. *v. 3* The book is to be read publicly in the churches, together with the Old Testament (I Tim. 4:13) and the writings of the Apostles (Col. 4:16; I Thess. 5:27).

2. The *Introduction* (1:4-8). John greets the seven churches in Asia, invoking upon them the grace and peace of God and of Christ. God is here described, as many times in the book, with the attribute of timelessness. By the seven (the perfect number) spirits, is meant the spirit of God Himself, "perfect and one in its various workings." Christ has been a faithful witness, and was raised from the dead to be the divine ruler of men. There follows this beautiful ascription to Christ, one of the most familiar in the New Testament and one which must have been unspeakably eloquent to the persecuted Christians to whom it first came, since it reminded them that Christ gained his heavenly peace through suffering, that his love will not only cleanse us from sin but will exalt us to be kings and priests with Him. It is this Christ who is coming to judge the world (Dan. 7:13; Zech. 12:10). God attests this by his Name (Ex. 3:14; Isaiah 44:6, 48:12).

This passage is of great interest in the development of Christian doctrine, since we have here a loosely formulated Trinitarian formula. The unique thing about it is that the Spirit is put second and not third. The ascription to Christ, who is given divine prerogatives, is evidence of the impression produced by the personality of Christ and by the real-

ities of Christian experience upon the mind of this Jewish Christian writer, "a true son of a race with which monotheism had become a passion." The description of God contains the important idea of God as a living and active participant in the affairs of men. "Him who is and was and is to come" implies his *presence*. It means God is *here*. All great religious characters have lived and labored in that persuasion. It is the ground of the Social Hope. The earliest Gospel insists upon the close connection between Christ and freedom from slavery to sin; from the first it has been "freedom for service"; for we are to be citizens of a spiritual kingdom, having like priests, access to God in order that we may minister to the spiritual needs of men. Early in the book the idea is conveyed, which runs through it to the end, of an omnipotent Christ overthrowing evil and discomfiting his foes. The idea, familiar to readers of Paul's letters (Rom. 8:37; I Cor. 15:24) and the Epistle to the Hebrews, is here given true expression. This spiritual idea will lie at the root of the Christian faith in the second coming of Christ. In the end, that is, it is to be a Christ victorious. In that faith we can labor with serenity and hope. This is the source and unshakable basis of the Christian optimism which is one of the outstanding characteristics of the Book of Revelation.

Chapter 1:4. John greets the seven churches in Asia with the blessing of God and of the spirits of God perfect in all their manifestations, 5. and of Christ who was a faithful witness and was raised from the dead and made the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who by his love not only redeemed us from sin, 6. but made us also to be kings and priests, be glory and power forever. 7. Look, He comes upon the clouds and all shall see Him who crucified Him and shall be filled with terror and dismay. 8. I, the Lord God, who am and who was, shall also come, even the Almighty.

*Notes v. 4 John* He is evidently so well known to his readers that further identification is unnecessary. **Seven churches** Many other churches are known to have existed in the province (e.g. Colossæ, Col. 1:2, Troas, II Cor. 2:12).

These seven represent not only all churches in Asia, but the whole church in the world. It is a book with a universal message to a universal church. **Seven spirits** (See 3:1, 4:5, 5:6.) The Holy Spirit is meant. The figure is taken from Zech. 4:2-10. **v. 5 first-begotten** See Col. 1:18; **prince (or ruler)**, i.e., the common Messianic conception of Christ. (See 17:14, 19:16.) **v. 6** (See Dan. 7:18, 27; I Cor. 6:2. See also Ex. 19:6.) **v. 7** (See Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27. Also, Zech. 12:10-12.) **v. 8** An unannounced change of speaker is common with the writer. (See 16:15, 18:20.) For this thought of God, cf. Isa. 41:4, 44:6, 48:12. In 22:13 practically this same language is applied to Christ.

3. *The Prophet's Call and Commission* (1:9-20). The author describes in detail how he was commissioned to give this prophecy. In this, he follows the example of many of the Old Testament prophets. (1) With the aid of a good map and reference to W. M. Ramsay's "The Letters to the Seven Churches," the reader will study the geography of Asia Minor, and familiarize himself with the topography of the whole region. Patmos was an island lying about fifteen miles off the coast from Ephesus. It was some thirty miles in circumference, and thither exiles were sent to work in the mines and marble quarries. (2) Read Dan. 10:5-9 and Zech. 4:4-6, and see how closely in his description of Christ the author has followed the "apocalyptic model." This imagery is not original with the writer, but is adopted from the Jewish literature with which he is familiar. (3) Note the tender way in which the author speaks of himself as their brother and fellow in their sufferings. In "the tribulation and kingdom" they were partakers together. Thus in every moment of social stress and struggle the modern Christian may feel himself to be the companion of the apostles and martyr of all the ages. (4) Think of the hope expressed in the faith that the living Christ was in the sphere in which they lived and labored and suffered. This has been ever since the source of the abounding social hope of all Christians. Compare Kingsley's

words: "I am struggling through infinite darkness and chaos by means of one great bright pathway which I find to be the only escape from infinite confusion, the only explanation of a thousand human mysteries—I mean the Incarnation of our Lord." Compare also Hebrews 2:8, 9, where, in the midst of a ruined world the writer is full of courage because he can "see Jesus," although "now we see not yet all things put under him." There is no substitute for this vision of Christ as the sure ground of social optimism. Only to those who share this vision can the words be spoken, "Fear not." (5) The question of whether these visions were an objective reality or not is not one upon which one can dogmatize. An objective experience of this kind lay behind the life and work of St. Paul, of St. Augustine, of St. Francis and of Martin Luther, to mention only a few outstanding historical examples. One would need to know more than is known about religious psychology to assert that the visions in this book were a mere literary device; at the same time the value and moral meaning of the Book of Revelation do not depend on any one theory concerning the nature of visions. (6) Note the suggestive symbolism of the churches. (a) Each church has a personality of its own. There are seven distinct and separate lamps. (b) The function of the church is to give light, whether as a lamp within or as a star shining overhead. (c) This light is drawn from Christ Himself, who walks among them that He may replenish them and keep them burning.

"O make thy church, dear Saviour,  
A lamp of burnished gold  
To bear before the nations  
Thy true light as of old."

Chapter 1: 9. I, John, your companion in faith and affliction, was in the island of Patmos in banishment because I preached the Gospel. 10. On the Lord's day I was inspired, so that I heard a loud voice 11. commanding me to write what I heard to the seven chief churches in Asia. 12. When I turned to see who spoke, 13. I saw Christ Himself

standing in the midst of seven candlesticks. He was clothed like a priest, 14. but his aspect was kingly, with flaming eyes and 15. shining feet and a voice like the roaring sea. 16. He had seven stars in his right hand and a sword came out of his mouth. 17. I was overcome at the sight. But he touched me and told me not to be afraid, saying: 18. I, too, am first and last, and am alive forever and have gained authority over Death. 19. Write the things that you have seen and shall see. 20. The meaning of the stars and the candlesticks is this: the candlesticks are the churches, and the stars are their angels, their spirit.

*Notes* **v. 9** The personal reference (cf. Dan. 8:1, 10:2; II Esdras 2:42, 3:1) is to emphasize the fellowship between writer and reader. **For the testimony** i.e. because of, in banishment for preaching the Gospel. **v. 10** A state of ecstasy is meant. (cf. 4:2, 17:3, 21:10. See also Acts 22:17, II Cor. 12:3, 4.) **Lord's Day** i.e. the first day of the week. (I Cor. 16:2; Acts 20:7.) The expression is here used for the first time, but it must already have been in common use. **v. 12** For the lamp-stand as symbol of the church, cf. Matt. 5:14, Phil. 2:15. (See Zech. 4.) **v. 13ff.** This description of Christ (v. 17) is taken from Dan. 10:5-6, 7:9. We touch thus early on the "exalted Christology" of this book. The sword in the mouth (v. 16) occurs frequently in the book (cf. 2:12, 16, 19:15, 21. See also Isa. 11:4; Heb. 4:12). **v. 16 Stars** (Possibly suggested by Dan. 12:3) These are another symbol of the churches. If lamp-stands suggests the presence of Christ *in* the church, the stars suggest his power to uphold it. **v. 17** (See Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 8:17; Matt. 17:6; Acts 26:14.) **v. 18 Keys** cf. the expression "gates of death." Hades was popularly looked upon as a prison-house of the dead (cf. Matt. 16:19; Rev. 3:7, 9:1, 20:1). **v. 19** The things which the prophet has seen are defined in the two clauses which follow (and not in what has preceded): viz. (1) the present condition of the churches, and the Lord's special message to them, as well as the present and eternal presence of God and of Christ ("the things that are"), and (2) the coming judgments and their results ("the things that shall be"). **v. 20**



Mystery, i.e. something secret, which is disclosed only to special persons, in special ways. (See Dan. 2:18; Rev. 17:5, 7.)

4. *The Messages to the Churches* (chapters 2, 3). All of these messages must be studied in two ways: first, with respect to the immediate historical situation, and, second, in their broader aspect as spiritual messages to the church universal. Even in the writer's day, the number seven was symbolic. There were many more churches in Asia than these seven. The number is used to include them all. In an even more inclusive sense, the number seven can be taken to include all churches of whatever age or clime. "The idea that the individual church is part of the universal church, that it stands for it after the usual symbolic fashion of the Apocalypse, is never far from the writer's mind. And he passes rapidly between the two points of view, the direct address to the local church . . . and the general application . . . to the entire Church as symbolised by the particular local church."<sup>1</sup> Our study of the messages will have regard to both of these viewpoints. The reader will have no difficulty in tracing the materials in these chapters to their sources in the Old Testament. The reader will also bear in mind that these messages are not to be considered as a section by themselves as if they had no relation to what precedes and follows. That connection, on the contrary, is very close. If you take the seven descriptions of Christ in the letters and put them together, you will have the full description of Christ as found in chapter I. The author is carrying out in detail his idea of the living Christ present in the actual life of the churches. Furthermore, it is the author's evident dramatic purpose to address solemn words of exhortation and warning to the churches to overcome and to hold fast and let no man take their crown, before proceeding to unfold the terrible panorama of the triumphant struggle of Christ with Satan, of the church with the Roman Empire.

<sup>1</sup> See Ramsay, *op. cit.*, pp. 200, 206.

(1) *The Message to the Church at Ephesus (2:1-7)*

Ephesus was at this time the foremost city of Asia Minor in rank, historical importance and wealth. It was a great commercial center, and also the home of many non-Christian religious cults, and the site of the famous Temple of Diana. At the time that this book was written, adherents of the "Nicolaitans" who had defended unchastity and idolatry, had preached there. But the church had rejected them and resisted their teaching. Evidently, however, brotherly love had suffered in the struggle, and this the church is exhorted to regain.

Chapter 2:1. To the guardian-angel of the church at Ephesus write: He who controls and is in the midst of the churches, says, 2, 3. I am aware of your patient endurance and your refusal to tolerate evil men and false apostles. 4. Yet you have lost something of your brotherly love. 5. This you must recover upon penalty of losing your position as a true church of Christ. 6. Your zeal against the Nicolaitans is praiseworthy. 7. He who is victorious shall eat of the tree of life.

*Notes* The reader will familiarize himself with the city of Ephesus, its location, wealth, influence. (See Acts 19:21ff. Also W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul, the Roman Citizen*; and *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 210ff. Also Hastings' Bible Dictionary in loco.) **v. 1** The message is to the **angel** of the church: i.e. the church's real spirit, or as we might say "better self"; that "self which is always stimulated to consciousness whenever God's voice is truly heard by it." It is always to the angel in the church (or in us) that God speaks. **v. 2 I know thy works.** "Every act of faith, every ministry of self-denial, every humble acceptance of the Cross . . . has its record in heaven."<sup>1</sup> Think how insignificant was this handful of Christians in great pagan Ephesus. What an encouraging example to any little congregation that feels itself to be lost amid its surrounding worldliness! **Apostles**, i.e. itinerant preachers. (See II Cor. 11:5, 13, 12:11.) Warn-

<sup>1</sup> Scott, p. 56.

ings against false teachers appear throughout the New Testament. It is a great power which belonged to that church to distinguish between the true and the false. To-day in the midst of many "strange doctrines" and aberrations from the simplicity of Christ, it is a distinction if the church can "divine where real right doth lie" and hold to the norm of Christian truth. **v. 3** Note that this church already had suffered severe persecutions. These are the background of the whole book of Revelation. **v. 4 Love** in its outward and social manifestations, in its objective power and initiative is the true "thermometer" of the life of the church. **v. 5** For an ingenious explanation of this as a change in geographical location, see Ramsay, "Seven Churches," p. 245. **v. 6** No matter how often we may fail, to hate what God hates is to be in the way of salvation. **v. 7 The tree of life** in the Paradise of God—thus the last book of the Bible joins hands with the first. What man was forbidden to eat there because of sin, he is bidden to eat here because he has been "washed and made clean."

## (2) *The Letter to Smyrna* (2:8-11)

Smyrna, a city of great antiquity, is the only one of the seven cities that to-day is of any importance. Its prosperity is due to its wonderful seaport location. In New Testament times it rivaled Ephesus in importance, was closely bound to Rome, and was the chosen site of the Temple built in honor of the Emperor Tiberius. In such an environment the primitive church confronted overwhelming odds. Up to this time Smyrna had been free from Roman persecutions, which, however, are about to begin. Their trial, like St. Paul's, had been at the hands of the Jews. We see here the transition from the one to the other. The tomb of Polycarp the Martyr (155 A.D.), still shown at Smyrna, is witness both to the reality and also to the end of the persecution of the church at Smyrna. How much it needed, how much we need to-day, the comfort of Him who is the present Christ, and who



Himself came out of death into life! Not a word of blame is attached to this church of Christ's poor; only the unforgettable promise of the crown of life. By the crown is to be understood not a material object, like the laurel wreaths of the victor, but the spiritual reward of a larger and more abundant life. This is the true Christian doctrine of reward.

Chapter 2:8. To the guardian-angel of the church of Smyrna write: He who died and lives eternally says: 9. I know your steadfastness amid the persecutions of those who falsely call themselves Jesus. 10. Do not fear the even worse trials which are about to befall you. Be faithful and you will win the martyrs' prize. 11. The conqueror will suffer the death of the body but not of the soul.

*Notes* Read about Smyrna. (See Ramsay, "The Letter to the Seven Churches," op. cit. pp. 251ff, and other authorities). **v. 9** Throughout the Book of Revelation the Christian is, to the mind of the writer, the true Jew. **v. 10** In the expression **ten days** we have the first of many time indications to be found in the book. The symbolism of numbers in apocalyptic writing precludes the possibility of understanding them literally when referring to extension in time or space. When they refer to objects, the writer doubtless has a definite number in mind. But in regard to time and space the numbers denote generalized ideas: such as completeness, perfection, (three, seven, twelve); or unknown duration (as a thousand years); or a broken period of time (three and three and a half and its multiples). The effort to construct actual timetables of events out of this symbolic use of numbers can only be called grotesque. The student will recall how this numerical symbolism is carried over from Jewish writings (See Dan. 9:25; 12:11, 12). **Ten days** The writer here means to convey the idea that the time of persecution will be brief and definite. The fact that a *fixed time* is set for the triumph of evil is one of the characteristic comforts in all apocalypses. A reviving of this idea would have much to do with the invigoration of our Social Hope. It is the time relation which perplexes and finds its utterance in the cry "How long?" The idea that

this answer is known to God, if not to us, is a source of social inspiration.

### (3) *The Church at Pergamum* (2:12-17)

Pergamum had been the royal city of ancient native kings, and situated on a high hill, it was royal to behold. It remained, at least to the end of the century, the seat of the Roman government and the residence of the pro-consul of Asia. The phrase "Where Satan has his throne," is an undoubted and intensely interesting reference to Pergamum as the seat of emperor-worship in Asia Minor. This included the erection of temples, the first of which was built at Pergamum, since it was the seat of the provincial government. The plain reference to a martyr by name is proof that persecution for failure to worship the Emperor already had begun, and reference to the Nicolaitans shows how general was this pernicious teaching. Surely for these little churches there were "fears within and foes without." Consider what a witness to the austere morality existing in these little Christian communities in the midst of heathen licentiousness is indicated by the sharp rebuke to this persecuted church because of the lapse of a few of its members.<sup>1</sup> But behind and above that church was the two-edged sword of One who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, mighty to save. There is social comfort there for Pergamum of old and for many a church at Pergamum to-day.

Chapter 2:12. To the guardian-angel of the church at Pergamum write: He whose words can cut like a sword says: 13. I know that you are in the center of Satanic persecution, and that although a martyr has already fallen, you did not deny me. 14. Yet there are some among you who practice and teach immoralities, 15. and the heresies I hate. 16. Repent, or I will come and destroy you. 17. The victor shall receive mystic food and a secret name written on stone.

<sup>1</sup> See Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christian Life in the Primitive Church*, 1904.

*Notes* **Pergamum** (the neuter is the more common form). (See Ramsay, op. cit. pp. 281ff., and consult other authorities as above.) **v. 12** The idea is the destroying power of the condemnation of Christ, so frequently appearing in this book. **v. 13 Satan's throne**, i. e. the seat of Emperor-worship. Nothing more is known of Antipas. **v. 14 Balaam**. (See Num. 31:16ff.) **v. 15 Nicolaitans**. Our only knowledge of this sect is the information contained in this book. **v. 17** For the source of the word **hidden manna**, see Ex. 16:32-34, Heb. 9:4. It was manna "kept before the ark in the holy place which was hidden by God when the temple was destroyed, and kept for the Messianic age."<sup>1</sup> To eat of this manna was to be one of the joys of the Messianic Age. (See John 6:48-51.) Christ Himself to the Christian is thus the heavenly manna. For the source of the **secret name**, it is probable that we must look not to Jewish sources but to the pagan practice of attaching mystical and even magical significance to secret names, the knowledge of which conferred supernatural powers and unlocked mysteries, since they were regarded as a password or Open Sesame. The **white stone**, an amulet containing the victor's name as an inscription, giving power against every enemy. But Christ gives a new secret name which opens the gates of everlasting life. If this explanation is the correct one, how it illustrates the way in which even the most superstitious ideas of the age could be turned to divine uses by the Spirit of a Christian inspiration!<sup>2</sup>

#### (4) *The Church at Thyatira* (2:18-29)

This letter is the longest and the most obscure and difficult. Thyatira was a town of little importance. It had no natural advantages, no famous past history. It was the humblest of all the seven cities. Its chief industry was that of dyeing woollen goods. It was a Gentile church, and the Jews are not

<sup>1</sup> Porter, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> See Beckwith, pp. 462, 3.

mentioned. It had had a good record of love and service, but the Nicolaitan teachings, resisted elsewhere, had gained the upper hand here, and for this the church is severely condemned, in the hope that it may be summoned to repentance.

Chapter 2: 18. Also write to the guardian-angel of the church at Thyatire: He whose vision searches the heart and who abides in strength says: 19. I know your many virtues. 20. But you permit the presence of a false prophetess who teaches you false doctrines and practices. 21. She has refused to repent, 22. and I will destroy her and her devotees, 23. that all the churches may know that I discern the heart. 24. I add no other warning to those of you who have not known, as they say, the deep things of Satan, 25. except to hold fast. 26. The conqueror will rule over the Gentiles. 27. and they shall be destroyed as God Himself said. 28. Also I will give him the brightness of the morning-star. 29. Give heed to this message.

*Notes For Thyatira, See Ramsay and Hastings. v. 18* A picture of the all-seeing and kingly Christ. (cf. II. Chron. 16:9, Luke 2:35, 8:17; I Cor. 4:5, 14:25; Heb. 4:13.) How ably this description completes the picture of the "meek and lowly Jesus," as an authoritative reviewer and arbiter in our world of chaotic and unjust social conditions! The feet of burnished brass are indicative of strength. Note that the attributes of omniscience and omnipotence ascribed to Christ are those which are the most characteristic attributes of God in the Old Testament. Yet here in the New Testament we find a Jewish writer raising Jesus to the plane of God. It is indirect evidence of the impression produced by Christ which could create this revolution of thought. *v. 19* "Love, faith, ministry, patience." What a wonderful record for a church in the days in which this book was written, record which can be paralleled to-day on many a mission field at home and abroad! It suggests the full spiritual program for any church. *v. 20* Study the use of the words "prophets" and "prophecy" in the New Testament as related to the life of the church, by the use of Hastings' Bible Dictionary. Prophets were a recognized class in the primitive churches, second only

to apostles, whose claim rested upon "gifts of the Spirit." Then, as now, the distinction between true and false prophets was possible only by an enlightened conscience (cf. Deut. 13:1-3). This false teaching in lax morals has its parallel in our day. The question of partaking of idolatrous sacrifices evidently continued to be a burning one after St. Paul's day. "No other burden" is an evident echo from Acts 15. A distinction is to be made between eating things strangled with blood and being participators in idolatrous feasts which would be equivalent to idolatrous worship (cf. Acts 15:28 and I Cor. 10:21). It may well be that in this case these feasts were accompanied with licentiousness (cf. Jude 4, 7). As against all this teaching that the freedom of the Christian life implied freedom also from the moral law, cf. Rom. 6:1, 2, Gal. 5:13ff.

**v. 24 The deep things of Satan** i.e. plainly unholy things which are "camouflaged" as profound truths which only the learned and initiated can understand. Precisely so in our day, departures from the simple rules of conduct are often spoken of as evidences of a higher worldly wisdom. **v. 26 The rule over the nations** included the Roman Empire itself. What a wonderful confirmation of this apparently impossible prophecy is afforded by the history of Christianity during the two centuries which followed! **v. 28 morning-star.** An obscure symbol, perhaps derived from Dan. 12:3. (See Job. 38:7.) In 22:16, Christ Himself is the morning-star.

#### (5) *The Church at Sardis* (3:1-6)

Sardis had been the capital of a great kingdom, but its glory had waned. Its natural situation gave it the appearance of being impregnable, yet it had often been taken. When this letter was written, it had been outstripped by its rivals Ephesus and Smyrna, and was of third-rate importance. The history of the city is thus closely paralleled by the history of the church within. Apparently it had had an untroubled history; nothing is said of hostility or persecution. The very

lack of it may account for its indifference and apathy. The purpose of the message is to call it back to life.

Chapter 3:1. And write this to the guardian-angel of the Church at Sardis: He that has divine omniscience says: I know that you are thought to be alive. In reality you are dead. 2. Wake up and reinforce what little good remains, for nothing that you have done is complete before God. 3. Recall what you have learned and repent, lest I come upon you with sudden judgment. 4. There are some undefiled persons left among you who will walk with me when I come. 5. These shall be found written in the book of life and shall be known before God as my disciples. 6. Give heed to this message.

*Notes* For Sardis, see Ramsay, pp. 369ff. Also Hastings' Bible Dictionary. **v. 1** By comparing v. 1 with chapter 2, v. 1, a difference is noted. There Christ is represented as walking amid the candlesticks. Here we are told that Christ holds in his hand not only the seven stars but also the seven spirits of God. In this new phrase the author may desire to express the idea that although the earthly influence (candlesticks) of the church at Sardis has waned, its heavenly counterpart (stars) still remains, and that Christ through his Spirit is still able to revive the soul of his church. This idea of the essential immortality of the earthly shrine of the spirit of Christ is beautiful and true. **Thou art dead.** This is true of many a modern church which has lost its communicating and vitalizing power, and of many people who may seem to be healthy, but are not, in any real spiritual sense, alive. It becomes a most earnest and practical question with any soul: Am I dead or am I alive? To what extent can it be said that I am truly living? **v. 2** Always for purposes of self-recovery, one can establish **what remains**. This is the secret of the optimism of all true social workers. Like their Master, they "know what is in man" (John 2:25), and their eyes pierce through the outward corruption to the divine remainder of manhood within, and proceed to build upon that. If there was such a remainder in the church at Sardis, surely there is in its modern counterpart, whether church or individual.



Always there is at least the memory of what has been heard at home, at church, of prayer, God, Christ, Bible. To hold fast to this and to repent is the beginning of a new life. **vv. 4, 5** We have here the suggestion of the "inner shrine" of even this corrupted church, the undefiled souls of the faithful remnant. Even in the most decadent church to-day this saving remnant can always be found. The origin of the phrase **the book of life** goes back to the Old Testament (Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 7:10; Mal. 3:16). It is there used as the roll of the blessed as it is used here. But in Rev. 20:12 it is also used as the book of judgment in which the deeds of men are recorded. It is in this latter sense that chief use has been made of the figure by Christian theology. **I will confess his name**, a reminiscence, and almost a quotation of one of the words of Jesus: Matt. 10:32; Mark 8:38; Lk. 12:8.

(6) *The Church at Philadelphia* (3:7-13)

The city was so named because of the loyal conduct of Attalus Philadelphus toward his brother and predecessor Eumenes II. It was founded B.C. 189. It was a place of importance in the imperial organization of Asia, possessing wealth and influence, and serving as a trade center for the district. The message warns of trials to come, urges fidelity, and promises a sure reward. A singular interest attaching to this epistle is the description it gives in v. 9 of the relation of ancient Israel to the "true Israel" of God, "one which must have perplexed every Christian Jew."<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 3:7. And to the guardian-angel of the church at Philadelphia write: He that is holy and true and has authority to admit and exclude whom he will, says, 8. I know your faithfulness. With but a little strength, you have not denied me. 9. I will cause the false Jews to be subject to you. 10. Because of your fidelity, I will guard you in the day of judgment. 11. Expect my coming, that you do not lose your reward. 12. The victor shall have

<sup>1</sup> See Beckwith, *op. cit.*, pp. 477, 478.



a permanent place in God's temple, and shall be known as belonging to God, and as a citizen of the Heavenly City.  
13. Give heed to this message.

*Notes* For Philadelphia, see Ramsay, pp. 391ff., and other authorities. **v. 7** This epithet is taken from Isa. 22:22. (See. Heb. 3:6; Matt. 16:19), and expresses supreme power. **v. 8 open door** This refers possibly to its position "on the threshold of the eastern country and to the rapidity with which the new religion was spreading . . . through the cities connected with Philadelphia." The **door** gives an entrance into missionary activity. How true it is of every church to-day that such a spiritual opportunity is presented to it. (Compare I Cor. 16:9; II Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The reward for this church of faithful work at home was the presenting of larger opportunity beyond. Thus the spiritual history of this church is an illustration in primitive Christianity of our Lord's parable of the talents.<sup>1</sup> **v. 9 The synagogue of Satan** (cf. chap. 2:9.) Note in this verse, which is quite in accord with the teaching of Christ in Matt. 20:26-28, the reversal of the prophecy in Isa. 61:4-6. Without doubt the primitive Christians were persecuted by the Jews for the same reason that Christ Himself was. Their teaching, like his, seemed to conflict with the intense nationalistic and "patriotic" sentiment of the Jews "to which its monotheism served as a buttress." To what extent to-day does Christian teaching take issue with the spirit of nationalism and "patriotism" falsely so-called? **v. 10** "The reward of keeping is being kept." Even this church to which no word of reproach is directed is not to escape trial, but it is to be kept through trial. The reward of virtue and fidelity is never immunity from pain, nor outward prosperity but the fellowship of Christ in suffering. **v. 11** "I come quickly." This is a note frequently heard throughout this book, and repeated in its last verse. In its most literal signification it may well refer to the Advent hope of all early Christians, which was not literally fulfilled. Doubtless for them

<sup>1</sup> The phrase may, however, mean simply an entrance into the glories of Christ's kingdom. See Rev. 3:20, 4:1; John 10:7, 9.

also, however, it meant the impending judgment of Christ upon the old world order, which was fulfilled. For all of us it contains the solemn truth of the imminence of a divine judgment upon all social iniquity and also the speedy revelation of the worth of every soul when it stands open and manifest in his sight (I Cor. 4, 5). v. 12ff. The promise of stability is given to a city in which the memory of a devastating earthquake was still fresh. (See Ramsay pp. 408ff. cf. Heb. 12:27-28.) In place of a statue in an earthly temple with one's name inscribed upon it, the faithful shall be under God's own name and sign (John 10:3; II Tim. 2:19), and be admitted and declared members of the divine society of men (cf. Eph. 2:19-22).

(8) *The Church at Laodicea* (3:14-22)

The history of this church is the opposite of that at Philadelphia. The city lay mid-way in a long valley connecting Ephesus with the East. It was the judicial and financial center of the district, founded for the purpose of transmitting to the interior Greek civilization and commerce, but failing in the accomplishment of this purpose. It imported, but failed to export; it received but failed to give. It grew to be a luxurious but ineffective center of wealth, and died from self-indulgence and apathy. This church was not suffering from either immorality or heresy, but from self-complacency and satisfaction. The teaching of Revelation accords with that of Christ in condemnation of the self-righteous Pharisee, the unprofitable servant, the harmless, respectable, "moral" church or individual. Selfishness, whether in church or individual, is the cardinal Christian sin. There may be more harm and danger in negative morality than in open hostility. Saul of Tarsus may become St. Paul the Apostle, but there is no future for one who is neither hot nor cold.

Chapter 3:14. Also to the guardian-angel of the church at Laodicea write: He whose word is truth, the faithful witness-bearer, who stands at the head of creation, says:

15. Because you are indifferent, neither good nor bad, 16. I will abhor you; 17. for you are rich outwardly but spiritually you are bankrupt. 18. I advise you to get from me true riches, the wedding garment, and salve for blindness. 19. If I speak severely, it is only because I love you. 20. I am ready to come in wherever I am welcomed as a guest. 21. The conqueror will share in my triumph even as I shared in that of my Father. 22. Give heed to this message.

*Notes* For Laodicea, see authorities as above. **v. 14** Christ is here described as the creative agent of God. (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) **v. 18** Laodicea was renowned for its fabrics,<sup>1</sup> the materials for which were provided by a famous black wool. It also had a medical school and manufactured an ointment for the eyes which was everywhere sought and used. These features of its material prosperity are used to prescribe for its spiritual needs. **v. 20.** "I stand at the door." We commonly think of truth as hiding itself behind a door to which we must find the key,<sup>2</sup> when, as a matter of fact, from Genesis (Gen. 3:9) to Revelation, we are shown God and Christ as seeking us. "If any man will but open the door, I will come in." **v. 21** The rewards and blessings of life here and hereafter are not for those who seek to escape the hard things of life, but for those who, taking their share of life's hardships, endure and overcome. (See Mark 8:34; II Tim. 2:3.) True men are not looking for the easy thing. In sports, in work, or in adventure it is the call to the heroic that wins a response. This is the martial summons of the Bible, not to a life of indolent acceptance of blessings prepared for it, but to the sacrificial life that dares and endures. The recovery of this appeal would mean the winning of men to Christ and his cause.

<sup>1</sup> See Ramsay, pp. 428, 9.

<sup>2</sup> See F. G. Peabody, *Mornings in the College Chapel*, pp. 107-9.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ETERNAL BACKGROUND

#### *Revelation, Chapters 4 and 5*

THE literary and spiritual purpose of these two chapters, and their place in the unfolding drama of the Apocalypse, are not hard to understand. The exhortation to the churches of Asia and through them to the churches of every place and time having been completed, the author is about to address himself to the revelation which has been given him of the judgment of God upon the world and of the impending trial and persecution of his people, which is to result in the victory of his cause and the reward of the faithful. Before, however, proceeding to a description of this struggle, tremendous in its scope and its consequences, the author gives us, in these two chapters, as a background against which this battle will be fought, a description first of the almighty and infinite God, and then of the omnipotent and invincible Christ. The purpose may have been to give the reader confidence in the outcome before he finds himself in the midst of the struggle. Always we must remember those early Christians for whom the book was primarily written. It is easy to understand the spiritual meaning of these chapters for those who were called upon to defend the cause of Christ with their lives. For all martyrs and witnesses and workers for Christ in every age, these chapters contain this imperishable hope that behind the battle, and watching over its issues, there is the eternal God, our refuge; there is the captain of our salvation who has gone forth conquering and to conquer.

In this appeal the author is true to the central teaching of

the Bible and to the central fact of Christian experience. The ultimate basis of the Social Hope for the Christian lies in the conviction of a living God and of a living and energizing Christ. These are the two indispensable convictions underlying a permanent Christian optimism. When these convictions exist, one can do full justice, as does the author of the Book of Revelation, to the fact of evil, without losing any of one's social confidence. There lies the ultimate and permanent meaning of these chapters.

To choose an instance from history to illustrate this point: what was the source of the extraordinary spiritual inspiration which led to the founding of the American Commonwealth, and laid the basis of our modern political and religious liberties? We find that it lay in a complete and overmastering conviction of the reality of God as the ruler of men and of their moral destiny. When we ask what manner of men these were and what the guiding truth and impulse was that impelled them to their great acts of faith and fortitude, we find the truth of God lying at the root and center of their lives, as the all-controlling motive, guiding alike their lives and the destiny of the cause of which they were the instruments. That creed is perhaps the most sublime that any man can hold; that creed will take men anywhere and prepare them for anything; that creed is essential to human happiness and to human progress. The world has rarely produced greater men than have been found under its influence. It was the creed of the Calvinists and of our Puritan forefathers. Merely to mention the fact that Calvinism gave to the world such men as William the Silent, Admiral Coligny, John Knox of Scotland, Oliver Cromwell of England, Jonathan Edwards of America, ought to make us realize that the world owes to it a debt which can never be repaid. "We may repudiate, and we do, the extreme Calvinistic dogmas; but let us frankly acknowledge what was great and noble in it. It was an iron creed, but it made iron men; so that the world never knew braver or stronger men than Calvinism bred. This humbling creed which laid a man

prostrate before his Maker made holy men like John Bunyan and Richard Baxter and the men of the Mayflower." It takes a great creed to make a great man, and there is no creed that is greater, whatever its minor defects, than that which puts God on his throne and acknowledges his sovereign sway over men. This ennobling creed that made men feel that they were the instruments and messengers of Almighty God made mighty men who would neither bend nor bow; who feared none but God, and who with splendid courage crashed against tyranny and wrong. It was of men nourished by such a creed that J. A. Froude (not a prejudiced witness) wrote: "They attracted to themselves every man in Europe that hated a lie. They were crushed down, but they rose again. They were splintered and torn, but no power could melt or break them. They abhorred, as no body of men ever more abhorred, all conscious mendacity, all impurity, all moral wrong of every kind so far as they could recognize it." It was men such as these who broke the back of tyranny in the state, and who preserved personal and vital religion so that whatever exists at this moment in the English-speaking race of accountability to God and of conscious fear of wrong, was branded into men's hearts by the Calvinists. The secret of their pertinacity, their courage, their indomitable will, was their belief in a sovereign God and in themselves as the agents of his will. It is of such stuff that heroes are made, and prophets; it is such men who "subdue kingdoms, obtain promises, and who turn to flight the armies of the aliens." Precisely this is the place which the fourth chapter of Revelation occupies in the religious experience of all men everywhere. It is the central teaching of the Bible that *God is in the midst*. It was Robert Louis Stevenson who said that a man can do and can hear anything if he really believes that God is on his side. That is just what this chapter says: "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

A similar purpose is intended and achieved by chapter 5 in the picture which it gives us of a present, living Christ.



No one can read and understand the Book of Revelation without gaining a vivid and permanent conception of Christ not merely as an historical character, as One who lived in the past and accomplished a ministry which ended with his death, but also of a living, energizing Spirit who accompanies the on-going life of the world, oversees its struggles, is in the midst of the eternal battle of righteousness, opposes Himself to the enemies of his cause, protects his people, and wins through them and with them and for them, the final victory. This is one of the chief values of the book, one of its greatest spiritual contributions to the Christian. It is a service which is desperately needed. One of the great lacks in the actual religious experience of many in our day is precisely this persuasion of a living Christ. The chaplains in the army reported an almost total absence of it in the experience of the soldiers in both British and American armies.<sup>1</sup> For many people to-day Christ is "a far-off historical character, the great Ideal . . . but He has nothing to do with the daily round." Precisely the opposite of this, of course, is the teaching of the New Testament. For the early disciples, Christ had everything to do with daily life. The living and accompanying Christ stands out on every page of the Acts and the Epistles. But nowhere is such a vivid exhibition of this truth given as in the Book of Revelation. The teaching of this book must revive and make real this integral and essential element of a true Christian experience. The apprehension of this truth is the ground of the Social Hope; gives the clue and meaning to a true social interpretation of history; and fortifies the individual soul in its struggle for righteousness. There is no substitute for this persuasion of the living Christ as the secret of the perpetual inspiration of the human soul.

In personal living, this conception stands central. In the midst of the monotonies of existence, or of great cosmic disasters, or of the decay of moral impulses, or the inveterate

<sup>1</sup> See Atlantic Monthly Sept. 1919, "The Church and the Civilian Young Man"; also, The Army and Religion (Macmillan), Chapter III.



evils of the world, who does not know his moments of moral vertigo, days when all his spiritual forces are threatened with panic? On such days the voice of the omnipotent and ever-present Jesus, traveling in the glory of his strength, comes to us in our fear and trembling, saying in a voice that penetrates to the inmost recesses of our being and rallies all our waning strength.

Peace, it is I. . . . In this world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

In our social struggle for a better world, as well as in personal living, this conception of a living Christ is indispensable. In the promise of Christ to his disciples, "Lo, I am with you even to the end of the world," the word "end" means not termination but consummation, perfection, completion. That is the Social Hope of the Book of Revelation. It gives us the picture of Christ working with men until the ultimate perfection and completion of the social order. That also is the Christian interpretation of history. When we survey the centuries that have elapsed since that promise was given, and since the last book of the Bible was written and sealed, what do we see? In the breaking up of the pagan world, the gradual disappearance of the old social order, the dawning of a new day, the story of human liberties, the rebirth of nations, the on-march of the Gospel, we see the coming of Christ down through the ages, the advance of the Son of Man traveling in the glory of his strength.

Behind the moral customs of society He stands, back of its laws, habits and practices, wielding upon them his irresistible power. It is impossible to read the record of social progress without the recognition of his shaping strength, his moral will, in forcing the civilized world out of its injustice and inhumanity. His sublime spirit is in the record; it is in the history of Christendom; it is in the present struggle; it is the hope of society. When did we need this inspiration more than we need it now? It is one of the glories of the Book

of Revelation that it produces this indelible impression of a Christ who is even now bending men to the doing of his will and putting all things under his feet.

That the Social Hope is never complete without the conception lying behind these two chapters of the Book of Revelation is proved by a careful observation of the social conscience that operates without this inspiration. There is, as we all know, a social conscience in the world that is devoid of the Christian inspiration. It may well be asked if the social movements of our time can afford to dispense with this inspiration, much less to despise it. Chiefly it is the Christian Idea which generates the spiritual sentiment, and above all the spiritual assurance and confident hope which must go hand in hand with culture and humanitarian passion and devotion, if human life is to be made sane and sweet and strong. Let any one contrast, for example, the abounding social hope of Christian missionaries from the very dawn of the Christian era, with the mood of many noble men and women who with the insight of prophets and the self-sacrificing devotion of martyrs are battling for righteousness outside of the Christian cultus and bereft of the historic Christian inspiration. When Robert Morison was sailing for China, the captain of the vessel asked him if he expected to be able to convert the millions of Chinese to Christianity. To which he replied, "No, I do not, but I believe that God is able to do just that!" In ethical and social workers who lack that persuasion, we sometimes detect an undertone of sadness, a note of wistful longing, a strain of "close-lipped patience, near-daughter to despair," which indicates the spiritual tragedy of many a noble life. What would it not mean if these souls could be thrilled, touched, quickened by the message of this book which would replace their noble melancholy with the persuasion that the living God is in the midst of his people so that their labor can never be in vain in the Lord; and that the omnipotent Christ is putting all things under his feet?

Chapter 4: 1. After this heaven was opened, as it were, and the same voice which had spoken to me in trumpet-tones before, summoned me to see the things that were about to happen. 2. At once I was inspired and behold, a throne in heaven, 3. and he that sat on it was like a rainbow set in jewels. 4. Surrounding the throne were seated twenty-four dignitaries crowned like princes and clothed like priests. 5. And thunders and voices issued from the throne, and seven torches typified the seven divine spirits. 6. And the sky stretched before the throne like the transparent sea; and within and about the throne were four living creatures which could see in every direction. 7. They resembled a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle, 8. but all had wings and all uttered praise to God without ceasing. 9. And at the sound of praise, 10. the twenty-four kingly persons worshipped God, renouncing their glory, 11. and giving all honour to him.

*Notes v. 1* **The voice**, i.e. the voice of Christ, as in 1:10. This Revelation is from Christ Himself. **Come up hither** "The vision of the reality and strength of spiritual things alone" can give us the perspective which will enable us to understand and to endure. *v. 2* "The sovereign power of the world was not on the earth but in heaven. This thought is the nerve of the whole chapter, and of the whole book. . . . The center of the universe, the foundation of its order and life, is God." There is always a throne above Domitian's. *v. 3* The reader can trace all of this description of the glory of God to its Old Testament sources. It is based on Ezekiel, chapters 1 and 10, and Isaiah, chapter 6. For heaven as the dwelling-place of God, see Ex. 24:10; I Kings 22:19. A special significance is not to be sought in each particular element or color. It is the general symbolism which needs to be borne in mind. The question of the relation of the precious stones mentioned in the Bible to our modern minerals is obscure. (See Hastings' Bible Dictionary on precious stones.) *v. 4* **Four and twenty elders**, i. e., angelic beings with the attributes of kings. They are doubtless taken from Hebrew tradition (Isa. 24:23), but their ultimate origin is probably to be sought in Babylonian mythology where twenty-four star gods were supposed to form a circle around the polar

star. **v. 5** The seven spirits have already been mentioned in 1:4 (cf. also 1:12, 16 and 8:2). Old Testament antecedents are to be found in Ezek. 9:2, but especially in Zech. 4:2, 10, where it is evident that the lights which are the eyes of the Lord were originally stars. By the figure is meant the all-discerning spirit of God. **v. 6** The pavement of the great throne-room of God is here described, and the likeness in color of sea and sky suggested the comparison. (See Gen. 1:7.) **v. 7** The four living beings (beasts) go back to Ezek. 1:5, 18. Originally they were doubtless wind-clouds (Ezek. 1:4, 5) which are the cherubim (Ezek. 9:3, 10:20) which bear the chariot of God. It is possible that this conception goes back still further to the mythological idea that four beings supported the four corners of heaven. It is plain that the author draws freely both from ancient mythology and from the Old Testament in giving poetic and symbolic expression to his faith that God is before all and above all and behind all; and that He who has made the world will redeem it and that nothing can thwart his purpose and his will, which the future will reveal. The reader will note how freely hymn writers have drawn upon this chapter. Bishop Heber's hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" is a transcript of this description of God. **v. 11** The purpose of creation is to satisfy its Creator (cf. Gen. 1:31). This conception is the ground of an imperishable Social Hope.

Chapter 5:1. At God's right hand, I saw a book-roll written on both sides and sealed with seven seals. 2. An angel called with a loud voice for one who was worthy to break the seals and open the book, 3. but none could be found. 4. And I mourned over this, 5. but was reassured by one of the kingly priests, who told me that the Messiah-Christ had been able to open the book. 6. And I looked and beheld there was one bearing like a lamb the marks of sacrifice, yet having all power and knowledge to do God's will in all the earth. 7. When He came and took the book, 8, 9. the living creatures and the kingly priests all worshipped Him because He was the Redeemer of all mankind, 10. and had saved and exalted his people. 11. The angels also, an innumerable company, 12. joined

in the hymn of praise. 13. And the whole earth swelled the chorus, 14. and the living creatures chanted the Amen, and the kingly priests fell down and worshipped Him.

*Notes v. 1* The idea of a book of destiny is taken directly from Ezek. 2:9, 10, Isa. 29:11, 12, and Dan. 12:4. *vv. 3, 4* Without the leadership of Christ and without the teaching of his spirit who alone leads us into all truth, God's scheme and plan for the world could never be translated into history. The events of the on-marching world are thus the Gesta Christi, since Christ alone enables men to make actual what otherwise would remain God's hidden purposes. Men have always been palsied by the doubt of whether they understood those purposes. That doubt is removed and assurance is attained through the breaking of the seals by Christ alone. The opening of the book by Christ signifies that present events are his fulfillment of God's purposes, and that thus they lead *in the end* to the salvation of the people of God and the servants of Christ. Human history is thus interpreted as the gradual unfolding of the will and purpose of God, every event, however contradictory it may seem to be, in the hand and keeping of Christ. Such a view of history alone provides a sure basis for social optimism. *v. 6* Note that this picture of Christ is made up of wholly different materials from those in 1:12-20. Here the idea is more distinctively Christian. By the seven horns is meant perfect power (12:3, 13:1, 17:3, 12), by the seven eyes (Zech. 4:10) perfect knowledge. Through his vicarious sacrifice Christ has gained his place at the right hand of God above all angels and other powers (cf. Heb. 2:9, 10; Phil. 2:5-11). The conception of Christ as Lamb is peculiar to Revelation and to the Fourth Gospel. Thence it has become one of the most familiar figures in Christian art and hymnology. "The Lamb is in the midst of the throne. The work of redemption and the means taken to accomplish it are ever before the mind of God." Christ by his "sacrificial death has unlocked the purposes of God for mankind, and the broad issue is that eternal love and

righteousness will prevail. . . . The final result is never in doubt among the heavenly host. . . . Whatever comes, eternal righteousness and sacrificial love are on the throne." All who share in this conviction can face without quiver of dread whatever struggles and sufferings they may be called upon to endure. The Cross is the final symbol of the Social Hope.



## CHAPTER VII

### JUDGMENT AND SALVATION

#### *Revelation, Chapters 6 and 7*

THE writer's preparations for ushering in his series of judgments on the world and the existing social order are now complete. The occasion of the prophecy, its trustworthiness and authority have been set forth in the first chapter. The second and third chapters have fulfilled their purpose in addressing both comfort and admonition to the churches of Asia, which are typical of all Christian churches then and now. In chapters 4 and 5 we have great visions of God and of Christ, of the Creator and the Redeemer who are behind and within the great world-movement which the prophet is about to describe. The drama of judgment can now begin.

This drama, however, does not unfold of itself. Here is no impersonal theory of history. These events do not happen of themselves. The author has used not only a high degree of literary skill, but has employed a social conscience which is fundamentally religious and Christian in portraying these events as transpiring only under the hand and only by the will and foreknowledge of Christ. He alone has the power to set in motion the series of events that shall judge the world, punish evil, overthrow Satan, vindicate righteousness and save his people. It is in the light of such a revelation that we of to-day should watch and study the events of history. Never, perhaps, since the day when the Book of Revelation was written have men had such a grandiose spectacle unfolded before their eyes of world-movements taking place



under the shaping hand of Christ. Sometimes this world moves so leisurely that it seems as if for centuries it stood still. Sometimes it rolls on at such a giddy pace that in a moment of time it seems to describe the orbit of centuries. Such is the age in which we are living. How much it would mean for us if we could view the great revolutionary events of the present as the expression in history of the shaping mind of Christ, who is overturning age-long evils, visiting judgment on an anti-Christian world order, and ushering in his kingdom! All over the world great revolutions in society and industry are taking place. By an assertion of social conscience such as no modern people has seen, the organized liquor traffic has been destroyed by one blow in the greatest industrial nation of the world. Verily, it is a time of judgment, when the crowns of mediæval monarchs have been rolling in bewildering succession in the dust, and some of the evils that seemed permanently entrenched in society have been cast aside.

All of the great drama of the past few years, which we have witnessed, is akin to that upon which the writer of the Book of Revelation looks with prophetic eyes. He foresees for his day what we have seen in our own. He describes the judgment which is to be visited upon a cruel, conscienceless tyranny which threatens the life of the church and dares to challenge the spirit of the omnipotent Christ. The sixth chapter is the core of the book, in the sense that it is the first of the three descriptions which the author gives of the disasters which are to overtake impious, godless, imperial Rome. With the opening of the successive seals of the Book of Destiny, the prophet beholds Four Horsemen which typify four different judgments which are to be visited upon Rome. The symbolism of the chapter is plain even to the casual reader. To one who studies its origins, it becomes as clear as daylight. The impressive eloquence of this description of woe and desolation cannot be heightened by any extended commentary. It is sufficient to refer to a recent use of the chap-

ter which illustrates its marvelous adaptation to post-war conditions. One of the most popular of the books produced by the war has been that by Vicente Blasco Ibañez entitled, "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." In this book we have a great effort to portray in human speech the terrible realism of the War. Its chapters convey a never-to-be-forgotten impression of the horrors of the German invasion. The author can find no imagery more adequate to his purpose than that of the sixth chapter of the Book of Revelation. He, too, sees four mythical horsemen riding over the fields of Flanders and of France, the symbols of Invasion, Civil War, Famine, and Death. He has given us in modern speech an amplification in terms of modern Europe of what the inspired author of the Book of Revelation first saw in the days of ancient Rome. He has pictured the judgment of Christ upon an impious world-order of our day, as the Book of Revelation set forth the judgment about to be visited upon imperial Rome one hundred years after the birth of Jesus Christ. Ibañez has caught the original inspiration of Revelation and has reproduced it in modern language for the use of this present generation.

It must once more be pointed out that the inspiration of this chapter, rightly viewed, consists not only in its literary style and lofty eloquence. It is seen when we contrast the apparent strength of Rome and of the Christian Idea when this chapter was written. While the weaknesses which ultimately resulted in Rome's overthrow doubtless already existed when this Apocalypse was written, they were not generally recognized, nor immediately visible. Rome still stood like a Colossus, unmoved and apparently immovable. On the other hand, the Christian faith was represented by a few scattered companies of Christians, recruited for the most part from the least educated and influential portions of the population—an apparently negligible element in the great Roman world. Yet it is the Idea enshrined within those Christian communities, according to this chapter, which is to destroy the Roman Em-

pire. More wonderful still, that prophecy was fulfilled within the following three centuries.

Chapter 6: 1. When Christ opened the first of the seven seals, there was a noise like thunder. This was the voice of one of the living beings who told me to come and see what should happen. 2. First, I saw a white horse and on it a bowman representing a royal nation that went forth to conquer. 3,4. Next I saw the second seal opened and I heard the living creature summon a red horse and his rider who typifies civil war that destroys peace from the earth. 5,6. The third seal was broken and I heard the voice call forth a black horse whose rider held seals in his hand representing famine. 7,8. When the fourth seal was opened and the fourth voice had spoken, there appeared a gray horse and its rider. This was death, which was to consume a fourth of the world. 9,10. When the fifth seal was opened, I saw under the altar the souls of the martyrs clothed in white who cried for vengeance on their enemies. 11. They were told to keep quiet a little time longer until the number of martyrs should be complete. 12,14. At the breaking of the sixth seal there followed a terrible earthquake that shook heaven and earth and 15,16. caused all men, the mightiest as well as the lowliest, to flee in terror from the wrath of the Lamb. 17. This was the Great Day of the Lord.

*Notes vv. 2ff* For the Old Testament original of the four horsemen, the student will refer to Zech. 6:1-8. They personify the four powers of evil which throughout the Old Testament prophets are the agents of God for punishing the world for its sin (see Jer. 15:2-3, 24:10, 29:17-18, 42:17, 44:13; Ezek. 5:12, 17, 14:21, 33:25). God will use these same instruments for the destruction of Rome. Precisely as the Old Testament prophets made use of political happenings in foretelling the destruction of Nineveh and Babylon, the author of the Apocalypse used the signs of the times in prophesying the downfall of Rome, the restlessness of subject peoples, social disorders, lack of food, and contemporary convulsions of nature. This fact, however, does not lessen for either Old Testament writers nor for this author the reach of a faith which could confidently declare that these omens presaged the downfall of an apparently invincible foe. **v. 2** The white

horseman does not typify Christ. His entrance is reserved for chapter 19. It is not conceivable that Christ should be presented both as opening the seals and also as appearing in response to the summons of an archangel. As indicated by the **bow**, this rider symbolizes the Parthians, one of the most feared of Rome's enemies, who fought with the bow, not used as a rule by the Romans. White, also, is the sacred color of the Persians, for whom the Parthians stood in later times. The Red Horseman naturally signifies War, specifically the slaughter of war and perhaps civil war ("they should kill one another"). **v. 5** The Black Horseman is Famine, a scourge of the Eastern world then as now. Black fitly represents the ensuing distress. The price named for wheat is enormous, perhaps twelve times the usual rate, which was a denarius (18 cents), for twelve measures (quarts) of wheat; and barley cost half as much. **v. 6** **The oil and the wine hurt thou not.** These words have been interpreted to mean that, by a kind of irony of fate, the luxuries of oil and wine are to be left untouched, while the necessities of corn and wheat are lacking. The words oil and wine, however, are regularly used in the Old Testament for the products of the earth (Deut. 7:13; Neh. 5:11; Joel 2:19). It seems more probable to suppose that the author means that this first visitation of famine is limited in scope and preparatory to the more dreadful calamities to follow (chapter 8:1ff). The Fourth Horseman is Death. Only a portion of the population is to be destroyed at this time by the four instrumentalities mentioned (cf. Lev. 26:22-26; Mark 13:7-9). **v. 9** The fifth judgment is in a class by itself. It was an ancient apocalyptic idea that the day of judgment could be hastened by the prayers of the saints (Rev. 8:3, 4) and cries of the martyrs (Enoch 47; Luke 18:7, 8). In the Old Testament uncovered blood is supposed to cry for vengeance. In the blood was the soul (Lev. 17:11). Hence when blood flowed, the slain cry for vengeance. While this cry of the martyrs may seem to fall below the prayer of St. Stephen (Acts 7:60), it must be un-

derstood as a passionate appeal of suffering righteousness for the vindication of Christ's cause for which the martyrs stand. (See Whittier, "The Christian Slave," Ps. 79:5-10; Heb. 12:24; cf. II Esdras 4:35). For the familiar notion that a predestined number of the elect must be fulfilled before the end, compare the phrase in the Book of Common Prayer: "We pray thee shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect and to hasten thy kingdom." **v. 12** The sixth judgment is an earthquake, frequent in the East then as now. This description is almost a reproduction of Matt. 24:29, 30. (See Isa. 2:19; Hos. 10:8; Luke 23:20.) **v. 17 The Great Day of the Lord** is a familiar apocalyptical idea from the time of Zephaniah (1:14, 15) on. It was a fundamental idea in the teaching of our Lord and the hope of the Christian church. It was the standing designation of the judgment day.

These great forces of judgment are still in Christ's hand. Once more they have been let loose on the earth; but they are all subject to Christ. Although apparently destructive, they are for the accomplishment of his will. Even the wrath of man and of nature has fulfilled the Divine purpose. Physical and social earthquakes over and over again in history have ushered in a new and a better order. We must look upon them as the author of the Apocalypse did as "under the control of Him who has the welfare of mankind at heart." They are summoned forth by the Saviour who opens the seals. Ours is the faith that even the most feared of human events are obedient to his work. This is the ground of our Social Hope. Thus is depicted for us in the most impressive way the eternal truth that through the continuous processes of nature and man, evil shall be destroyed. We see the picture of the pouring of the wrath of God upon all iniquity and sin.

Nowhere does the literary and artistic structure of the Book of Revelation appear more clearly than in the chapter to which we have now arrived. Instead of having the seventh seal broken at once, and bringing the first series



of judgments to a close, the author here interrupts this story of retribution by a passage in which is depicted in immortal language the safety of God's people. The literary effect of this postponement of the final scene in the drama of judgment is to heighten the expectation of the reader. Its moral effect upon those tried and persecuted Christians for whose comfort and assurance this book was first written was to create the conviction that nothing in nature or human events, no "principality or power," could separate them from the love of God. Whatever happened, their salvation was sure. Before even more dreadful scenes of judgment were revealed, this beautiful word of comfort is given to them by the prophet. The spiritual meaning of this chapter for all Christians and for all time is that the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God; that He preserveth all that put their trust in Him. This chapter, one of the sweetest and most familiar in the New Testament, acquires fresh meaning and eloquence from an understanding of its position in the Book of Revelation, and the message which it brought to those for whom it was first written.

The chapter falls into two parts. The first section comprises verses 1-8, and the second section the rest of the chapter. This second section is by far the more familiar of the two, and upon it the Christian heart dwells with gratitude. The first section, usually overlooked, is seen, however, upon examination, to contain a spiritual truth of great significance and of immense comfort.

The angels of God stay for a moment the tempest of wrath, and another angel commands them to prevent the destruction of the earth until the servants of God shall have received the sign and pledge of their salvation. There follows what may well be termed a family roll-call. The tribes of Israel are named in turn and in each tribe all are "present or accounted for." The perfect number is returned for each one. So understood, what at first sight appears like a monotonous and wearisome repetition of names, becomes one of the most

eloquent passages in this eloquent Book. When God comes to "count up his jewels," to number the redeemed, He *begins*, that is, with his own family, the family with which the Bible began. The history of that family is Bible history. The name of that family was "the children of Israel." That family was destined to bring into the world the knowledge of the one, true and only God. Out of that family was to spring He who was destined to be the Saviour of men. And now at the end of the Bible, which has told of this great family history, and of what it had done for the world, the names shall be called, the names of the children of Israel. It was long, long ago that we first heard that list of names. It was away back in the book of Genesis. Jacob had come into Egypt, "and all his seed brought he with him into Egypt"; and then for the first time we listened to the names of the members of that family with whom we were to become so familiar and whose fortunes we were to follow for so many hundreds of years: twelve children, twelve sons, and their names follow,—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, so the roll goes on, and the last name of all was Dan. And now we have come to the end of the Bible, and once more that list of names is going to be called. Before the number of the ten thousand times ten thousand, before the multitude which no man can number, first of all there will come this family roll-call; and we feel that this is right, that this is the way it should be. Judah's name comes first, since out of that family sprang the Lamb of Judah before whose throne this great multitude is gathered. Each answers to his name as it is called. Each separate family is complete; each family has grown to number twelve thousand. The full number is twelve times the twelve thousand of each.

And I heard the number of them which were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel.

Read the passage so; remember that it is the last time that these names are to be called; think of the great history of



that family, the long journey they had traveled, their vicissitudes, struggles and labors; remember that it is in heaven, in God's own home, that this roll-call is heard, and how beautiful and tender is the reading!

Our impression of the eternal worth and comfort of this family roll-call is deepened if we let our minds rest upon certain salient features of the history of the family of God. First, it was a scattered family. "Israel is as a scattered sheep" (Jer. 50:17) for "Thou hast scattered us among the heathen" (Ps. 44:11). That family had never really lived together from the day that Joseph went down into Egypt. Of the twelve tribes, ten were afterwards spoken of as "lost." But before the Bible closes we have this beautiful reunion picture. Second, the history of this family was very eventful. Theirs was a long, troubled and tragic career. Every strange and terrible event that could befall a family happened to the family of God. They were spared no imaginable affliction. It was of that home that the prophet wrote.

O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted (Isa. 54:11).

Its grief was even symbolized by

Rachael weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted (Jer. 31:15).

And yet, before the Bible closes, we find the word of promise kept,

. . . Thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear, and from terror, for it shall not come near thee (Isa. 54:14).

Third, the family of God had known terrible family estrangements. These brothers had hated each other with a ferocity which it seemed nothing could heal. From the day that Joseph was sold into Egypt, through the period of the Judges when Benjamin was terribly punished by his brothers, to the division of the kingdoms which resulted in permanent fam-

ily alienation, this family presents a record of uninterrupted discord which has no parallel in history. How wonderful, it appears, therefore, before the Bible ends, to find even these wounds healed, and the members reunited in the heavenly home. And how prophetic of the redemption of other families appears this final roll-call, for none can have been more scattered, more afflicted, more divided. How our faith is thus increased in the final reunion of the families of God!

There is one more significant fact to be noted in this roll-call. There is one name that is missing. We do not find the name of Dan. We know that this cannot be by inadvertence. There must be some deep moral meaning in such an omission as this. And there is. Dan presents the most tragic career of all the sons of Jacob. There seems to have been something wrong with him from the first. When the dying father came to breathe his prophetic prayer over his sons, he spoke a strange word for Dan:

He shall be a serpent in the way; an adder in the path.  
(Gen. 49:17.)

To the Hebrew a serpent was such a sinister figure that this could mean only a sinister end. When they came to Canaan, Dan did a strange thing: he made for the sea. The Hebrews had such an antipathy for the sea that that could only mean that Dan cut himself off from the real genius of the family life. When the roll is called in the Chronicles, Dan is not there, and tradition tells us that it was from Dan that the Anti-Christ sprang, who was to deny and make war against the Lord's Anointed. Dan had permanently left the Lord his God. He had chosen, by himself, to set up his will against that of the Almighty. However melancholy the omission of his name may seem to be, let us remember that it does infinite justice to the tragic nature of moral realities. It suggests the solemn lesson that by one's own moral choice one can exclude oneself from participation in the life of God. While there is nothing in this passage to preclude the possibility of a future re-entrance into that fellowship, it does contain a cor-

rective to the easy-going assumption that just because one is of the family of God, one's future salvation is assured. It does teach that conscious surrender to and acceptance of the will of God is the condition of being among the number of the redeemed.

The second section (7:9-17) of this chapter is among the most familiar in the book. It is frequently read when we come to lay away our dead. It calls for no extended comment. It speaks home to the heart with a music all its own. Let it be noted, however, that the Bible is the only book, and Christianity is the only faith, which has, after taking care of its own, a promise for the great unnumbered multitude. From this point of view the words "After this" are among the most inspired in the Bible. They point to the immense catholicity of that faith, limited to no chosen people, to no particular race, but including within its reach all the children of men. This passage points to the universality of that company of the redeemed that is coterminous with the reach of the Holy Spirit of God. It rebukes all particularism, and provincialism which seeks to limit the number of God's saints by a "strictness which He will not own." It tells us that the "love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind" and that "the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind." And it tells us further that little as the finite mind can recall and remember every last, hidden saint of God, He remembers them all and calls each by his name and numbers them among the multitude of his elect.

Chapter 7, 1-2-3. Then I saw divine Beings appear who restrained the forces of destruction, and another archangel commanded that the earth should no longer be hurt until all the servants of God and followers of Christ should receive the mark that should assure their safety. 4. Then I heard the roll called of the tribes of Israel, the children of God, to whom the covenant of God was made. 5-8. As each name was called, the full and perfect number of that tribe was found present and received on his forehead the seal of salvation. 9-12. After that I saw a multitude of redeemed before the throne of God so great that no finite

mind could possibly number it. These came from all nations and peoples on the earth, and they stood before God and Christ and worshipped them. 13,14. When I asked one of the angels who they were, he told me that they were faithful souls, who preferred persecution and death to disloyalty, 15,16. and therefore are now given the victory over every form of human privation and suffering and are in the protecting care of God. 17. In the fellowship of Christ they forget all sorrow and are in perfect felicity and peace.

*Notes v.* 1 For the "four winds," cf. Jer. 49:36; Dan. 7:2; Zech. 6:5. *v.* 3 By the "seal" is meant a mark of authentication (Rom. 4:11) or of security (Rev. 5:1, 20:3). Both ideas are included here in contrast to the mark of the beast (13:16ff) (cf. also Gal. 6:17). For origins of the idea of a brief staying of the forces of destruction, see Ezek. 9:4ff; Baruch 6:4ff. It is probable that our author had in mind some apocalyptic source in which a calamity threatening Israel is to be stayed until God's chosen ones should be made safe. *v.* 4 The conception of a "true Israel's" forming the center or nucleus of the elect of God is a familiar Bible conception (cf. Ezek. 9, 47:13-48; 35; Rom. 3:1, 2; Rom. 9:1-5).

For passages relating to the history of Dan, see Gen. 49:17; Jer. 8:16. (See also Irenæus V. 30, 2.) Other explanations for the omission of the name are (1) that it is due to a copyist's error, and (2) that the tribe had long been extinct. The name is found in I. Chron. 2:2, but is omitted in I. Chron. 7. It occurs again in Ezek. 48:32. The idea already suggested for the omission of the name is accepted by many recent scholars. To fill the vacancy caused by the omission, the name of Joseph is added. By the 144,000 the author doubtless means the whole body of the Church, Jewish and Gentile alike; and by the **multitude**, every servant of God wherever found. The second section (*v.* 9ff) is of course a vision of the final consummation, introduced thus early to encourage those who are threatened with death. No great number of martyrs had as yet fallen victims to the Roman persecutions. This is the first

picture of the Christian heaven (as distinguished from the Jewish idea of a new earth) to be found in the New Testament. The sources for the description of the blessedness of the redeemed are familiar to Bible readers. (Isa. 49:10; Ps. 121:6; Isa. 25:8.) The word **throne** is used seven times in this short vision, conveying the idea of the power of God, and the perfect obedience to Him of all who find in his service their perfect freedom.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPETS

#### *Revelation, Chapters 8 and 9*

THE Heavenly Interlude being over, the reader is ready to have the seventh and last seal broken. He wonders what judgment can be reserved for the climax to those which have preceded. As a matter of fact, he discovers that the breaking of this seal results in the beginning of a new series of judgments. Since the book described in chapter 5 contained the whole drama of destiny, the seventh seal could not end it, but must itself lead to a new chapter in that total description of the judgment of evil and of the triumph of righteousness. In the same way the blowing of the seventh trumpet opens out into the emptying of the seven bowls of wrath (chapter 16).

The blowing of the seven trumpets, then, introduces a new series of judgments which are described in the eighth and ninth chapters. In these two chapters we have illustrations of the most bizarre imagery to be found in the Book of Revelation. The light of the sun and moon is darkened; there are earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; we read of swarms of locusts with men's faces and hair of women and crowns like gold, and of horses with stings in their tails, emitting fire and brimstone. If we can understand these chapters, we shall have no difficulty with any part of the book.

First of all, it is necessary to understand what the author is trying to describe. His object is to show that God is ruling his world; that He is neither dead nor asleep, and that his suffering servants have nothing to fear at the hands



of the pagan empire, since that empire itself is opposed by these destructive agents in the hand of God. God's people who have his seal in their foreheads shall escape, but all who do not repent shall be destroyed. There is an interesting similarity here to the story of the escape of the Israelites from Egypt, of the sign on the door-posts and of the plagues upon the Egyptians. Much in the description of the plagues is the same: frogs, lice, flies, beasts, hail, boils, locusts, darkness and death. The idea is the same. Another and a worse oppression has overtaken the people of God, and He uses the same agencies of destruction as before to compass the downfall of his enemies.

Again, it is necessary to remember that this series of judgments is an advance upon that of the seals. The first series told of the more ordinary judgments, the beginnings of woes which are preparatory to the final consummation. But with the sounding of the trumpets we have portrayed the awful plagues preceding the final conflict and all other events issuing in the final overthrow of evil and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God. We should naturally, therefore, expect a more highly colored apocalyptical imagery in these chapters which describe the vast world-movements leading up to the end.

Once more, it needs to be borne in mind that any language seeking to describe such supernatural events, must itself be super-natural. If one is describing the ordinary processes of history, one can use ordinary language. But if one is seeking to express the extraordinary intervention of God in behalf of his cause and his people, through nature and man, then one must use extraordinary language. All apocalyptic language is extraordinary. It takes on necessarily picturesque and grandiose forms, since it attempts to portray the resources of the infinite God in his struggle against sin. When once we understand the poetic and pictorial nature of this language, we will not look at it with literalistic eyes. We will not press it too closely for exact interpretation and understanding. Of course it has never happened and prob-



ably will not happen during the lifetime of the race that a third of the earth will be burned up, that locusts with men's faces will appear, that horsemen will run about with poisoned tails. But neither did Julia Ward Howe see Christ trampling out the vintage of the grapes of his wrath. This is poetic imagery, the general meaning of which is that the judgments of God in some form and in some way will fall on evil-doers in general, and in particular the Roman Empire, which is persecuting Christians.

In the next place, we must remember that in a general way it is true that these judgments, described in language that seems so fantastic, are based upon certain natural and social phenomena which had come under the eye and within the knowledge of the prophet who uses this language. It will not do to look too closely for actual plagues and woes of which these are the symbol. On the other hand, contemporary events doubtless did suggest some of the material. This has already been indicated in our discussion of the judgments in chapter 6. When civil war was referred to (6:4), Rome was on the brink of it; when the Parthian bowmen were alluded to (6:2), those dreaded foes of the Romans were an actual menace to the peace of the Roman Empire. Similarly, when in this chapter earthquakes, eclipses, and volcanic eruptions are referred to, and all kinds of natural horrors, it is quite probable that the prophet has in mind some catastrophe of recent occurrence, such as the eruption of Vesuvius, which in the first century had destroyed Pompeii. Indeed, it is not easy as one reads these chapters to avoid the conviction that John himself saw from the island of Patmos the lurid flames of some volcanic eruption, and had heard from fugitives of how fierce beasts had destroyed the vegetation, how sulphurous vapors had killed the fish in the sea, how waters were reddened as by blood, and how islands rose and sank again. Such phenomena are frequently used in poetic and prophetic ways in the Old Testament. What more natural means could be imagined for depicting the judgment upon Rome? The

same facts in natural history lie at the basis of his description of the invasion of locusts. Ramsay has described how he was the eye-witness of such a plague. The locusts advanced in thick mass-formation, in almost serried ranks with well-defined lines. At their head there went leaders, directing the mass behind them. They would settle on fields that were fair and green, but when, as by signal, they rose again, not one blade of green or living thing would be left behind them. The earth was as barren as if it had been burned off by fire. Such plagues were of common knowledge in those districts of Asia Minor. If one understands these features of Eastern geography, these descriptions do not seem half as mysterious as they may have appeared at first.

Finally, we must render account, as always, of the sources from which the author drew. As has been said, one reason why we find chapters like these strange, is because we ourselves are strangers to those portions of the Old Testament which furnished the material for them. Nearly every figure thus far used in Revelation is taken directly from some passage in the Old Testament. This chapter is no exception. For the fiery hail of 8:7, we recall Ex. 9:23; for the volcanic eruption of 8:8, Jer. 51:25; for the poisoned springs (8:10) Ex. 7:20-21; for the darkness of the heavens (8:12) Ex. 10:21-23, "a darkness which may be felt"; for the locusts (9:3ff) Ex. 10:12-15, and Joel 2:4-11: "the appearance of them is as the appearance of horses, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion." Finally, the horsemen (9:16ff) are doubtless suggested by the passage in Zech. 6, to which reference has already been made (see chap. 6) and also by a passage in Habakkuk (1:8) in which the prophet speaks of the Chaldeans whose horses are swifter than the leopards and more fierce than the enemy wolves, "and their horsemen shall spread themselves and come from far; and they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat." Is it not clear that if all these passages were familiar to us as we read these two chapters of Revelation, those chapters would have seemed familiar reading

also? If it is true in general that a knowledge of the Old Testament is necessary to an understanding of the New, that statement is particularly and convincingly true of the Book of Revelation.

The reader will note with respect to this second series of judgments that just as in the first series we had four specific plagues under the figures of the Four Horsemen, but that the fifth and sixth were different in character (the prayers of the saints and a general judgment), so, in chapters 8 and 9 the first four trumpets usher in definite catastrophes, but the fifth and sixth precede more elaborate visions.

Chapter 8:1. When Christ broke the seventh seal there followed an ominous silence. 2. Then the seven angelic beings who stand before God were given seven trumpets, 3. and an archangel appeared with a censer of incense which he laid upon the altar with the prayers of the saints. 4. This was a witness that these prayers would become an instrument of God in the execution of his authority and power. 5. For when the angel took the fire from the altar made by the mingling of the incense and prayers and cast it upon the earth, there followed manifestations of power in thunders and earthquakes and lightnings.

6. Then the seven angels in succession blew their trumpets. 7. At the blowing of the first trumpet, there came a fiery hailstorm that consumed a third of the vegetation of the earth. 8, 9. At the second, a fiery mass so large that it seemed like a mountain fell into the sea and destroyed a third of the fish and of commerce. 10, 11. At the sound of the third, a comet blazing like a torch fell from the sky upon the rivers of the earth and poisoned their waters so that a multitude of people perished. 12. When the fourth trumpet sounded, an eclipse so terrible took place that a third of sun, moon and stars were stricken with blackness so that the world was in darkness for a third of the day and night. 13. Before the next trumpet blast, an eagle flying in mid-heaven proclaims doom upon men because of the woes which are to follow.

9:1. Then the fifth angel blew, and an angel-star fell on the earth and an abyss was opened to which this angel had the key. 2. Out of this pit came smoke as from a huge cauldron which darkened the atmosphere. 3. And out of the smoke came swarms of locusts which had the stinging power of scorpions; 4. and this power was to be used not upon vegetation but upon men who were not sealed with

the sign of God. 5, 6. And their sting when they struck was not to prove fatal at once but was to cause an agony that would be indefinitely prolonged until the men longed in vain for death. 7. In form these locusts resembled huge war-horses, but they had royal crowns on their heads which were like those of human beings, with a face like a man, 8. hair like a woman, and teeth like a lion. 9. They were clad in armor of iron, and when they flew there was the sound of racing chariots and of cavalry rushing to battle. 10. Their poisonous striking-power was in their tails, and those whom they struck were tortured for a long time. 11. And these demon-powers had a king over them, even the angel who had opened the abyss to release them, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek Apollyon. 12. Here endeth the first woe. But the worst are to follow.

13. Then the sixth angel sounded his trumpet; 14. and a voice from the very presence of God commanded him to unleash the four angelic beings that were bound at the river Euphrates, 15. who had been kept ready for that very hour of that day and month and year to kill the third of men. 16. And the number of the troops of their cavalry was two hundred millions (I heard the exact number). 17, 18. And this is how the horses and their riders looked in my vision. Their armor was not of iron and steel, but of fire and brimstone. And out of the mouths of the horses which had heads like lions there came blasts of fire and smoke as from a volcano, 19. for they had power in their mouths as well as in their tails, which had heads like serpents that struck and hurt men. 20, 21. Terrible as these plagues were, however, the men who were not destroyed by them did not repent and did not forsake worshipping demons and senseless idols and did not give up murders and superstitious practices and all kinds of immorality.

*Notes* 8:1 The profound silence gives striking dramatic effect to what follows. Half an hour would seem to denote a long pause. v. 2 The seven angels are referred to as if well-known; but they do not appear in the earlier visions, unless they are the same as the seven spirits of 1:4, 4:5, 5:6. They are doubtless the seven archangels familiar to Jewish apocalypses (cf. Tobit 12:15; Enoch 81:5, 90:21ff; Luke 1:19). vv. 3-5 There is in this passage no suggestion of the mediation of an angel between the prayers of the saints and God. Such an idea is found in Tobit 12:12, 15, etc., but not in the New Testament. The idea is rather that the incense of the

angel re-enforces the prayers and accompanies them and authenticates their efficacy. For the altar of incense, cf. Ex. 30:1ff; Lev 4:7. The idea of prayers as agents of Divine Power, already occurring in 6:9,10, is a dramatic description of the social value of intercessory prayer. We do not often enough think of prayer as a form of social work (cf. Col. 4:12). **v. 5** cf. Ezek. 10:2, from which the idea is doubtless taken. The same idea in other forms of an immediate Divine answer to prayer is found in Matt. 3:16, 17; John 12:28, 29. The prominence given in these visions to the manifestation of the anger of God is a characteristic of all apocalypses, which belong to times of persecution and denote the power of God to overthrow evil when the power of God's servants appears inadequate to the task. We need always this faith as a part of our working religious apparatus. The remarkable spiritual eloquence of the description of these terrors will not escape the reader. **v. 7** (cf. Ex. 9:23ff and Ps. 18:3). The addition of blood here may be suggested by Ex. 7:17ff and Joel 2:30. **v. 11** The idea of a corruption of water is taken from Ex. 7:20, 21, and the name wormwood from Jer. 9:15 (cf. also Jer. 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; Deut. 29:18; Prov. 5:4). **v. 12** For the plague of darkness, cf. Ex. 10:21ff; Isa. 13:10; Joel 2:31; Amos 8:9. **v. 13** The better reading of the Revised Version substitutes "eagle" for "angel." The eagle is used as messenger in the Jewish apocalypses. **Chapter 9:1-11** The vision of the locusts is taken from Ex. 10:12ff and Joel, chapters 1 and 2, but the locusts are here transformed into supernatural creatures, whose characteristics are in part taken from fantastic exaggeration of natural locusts and in part from mythological tradition. The author treats freely and with apocalyptic imagination the materials which he uses as a basis for his description. **9:1** The idea that stars had a conscious personality is common in Jewish writings (cf. Judges 5:20; Job 38:7). Cf. also Enoch 21:6, "these are the number of the stars of heaven which have transgressed the commandment of the Lord." (See Jude



v. 13.) The star here is certainly not Satan, who nowhere in Revelation appears as an agent of God. "Bottomless pit" is used in a general sense of the underworld in Rom. 10:7; Ps. 71:20, and also in a specific sense of the prison of evil spirits in Lk. 8:31, and elsewhere in Revelation (11:7; 20:1, 3). It is represented as locked. (cf. Rev. 1:18.) **v. 2** (cf. Ex. 19:18; Joel 2:10). **vv. 5, 6 Five months** (see v. 10). Visitations of locusts in the East occur during the five dry months. (For v. 6, cf. Job 3:21.) **v. 7** There is an Arab saying that the locust has a head like a horse, a breast like a lion, feet like a camel, a body like a serpent, and hair like a maiden (probably suggested by the antennæ of the locust). **v. 11** For an opposite idea see Prov. 30:27. Abaddon means destruction or the place of destruction. Sheol or Hades is personified in Job 26:6, Prov. 15:11. (cf. Rev. 6:8.) The word Abaddon occurs only here, and the author translates it into Greek (Apollyon meaning Destroyer). **v. 14ff** (cf. Ezek. 38:14ff.) From Ezekiel on, an invasion of a fierce host becomes a standing apocalyptic event. (cf. Isa. 5:26ff; Jer. 1:14ff, 4:13, 6:22f, 47:3, 50:42; Joel 3:9ff; Zech. 14:2.) To this idea the author adds his fabulous and supernatural descriptions of this aerial cavalry. The location of this host at the river Euphrates suggests the Parthians. **v. 15** It seems probable that the author had taken this idea of four angels from a familiar tradition in which four destructive powers (angels, winds) come forth from the four quarters of the earth. (cf. Zech 6:1-8; Dan. 7:2). To this is added the derived notion that these agents of destruction are the leaders of the Parthians, located at the Euphrates. The idea of a fixed time is central in all apocalypses. **v. 18** (cf. Job 41:19ff.) Fire-breathing monsters are figures in all mythology. **vv. 20, 21** It is a familiar and tragic fact, abundantly proved in history, that men are not long sobered by even the most terrible calamities. The resistance of men's moral nature to the lessons of great catastrophes constitutes one of the most baffling problems in moral and religious psychology. Compare

Eugene Sue's terrible description in "The Wandering Jew" of the levity of Paris during the cholera scourge. We are told that when the plague was at its height in London in 1665, riot and vice were rampant. "Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."



## CHAPTER IX

### THE SECOND INTERLUDE

#### *Revelation, Chapters 10 and 11:1-14*

**S**TUDENTS of the Book of Revelation who hold that it is not a unity, and that interpolated sections are to be found in it which must be removed and the material rearranged in order to discover its original form, find food for their argument in these two chapters. Surely here, they say, we find an unaccountable interruption in the argument. Just as we are about to hear the seventh trumpet blow which will usher in the climax of the judgment, the process is halted so that the prophet may receive anew his commission. But how could he have received that commission more solemnly than in the opening chapter? Why should these chapters be inserted here? The habit of rearranging the material in Bible books to make it more logical is itself open to grave objections. It will not do to classify inspiration with topical exactitude. The moods of the soul do not obey the categories of the logician. Emotion does not proceed in orderly progression. What are looked upon as interruptions and interpolations are often the breaking through of pent-up feeling, the resurgence of spiritual ideas that wreck the program while they reveal the soul.

Without doubt the author of the Book of Revelation was overtaken by such a mood when he reached the point to which we have now arrived. From the point of view of dramatic surprise and literary effect, nothing could have served his purpose so well. He is about to advance to the last series of judgments which itself will lead up to the final collision

between the Empire and the church, Satan and Christ, the evil and the good, which in turn will usher in the day of judgment and the day of salvation. Here the prophet pauses to gather strength for this final effort of the soul to depict these great and culminating events. He recoils, as it were, upon himself. The tides of the spirit which have spent themselves in the awe-inspiring description of the sounding of the trumpets recede into the depths of the soul before they rise once more to even greater heights. The prophet must receive a fresh commission before he can proceed. And if the prophet needs this fresh assurance, so do his readers. Precisely as chapter 7 was intended to assure them of their safety before the trumpets were sounded, so chapter 11 is written to convince them that nothing can violate the inner shrine of God's Temple, nothing can destroy his witnesses until their testimony is complete.

"In this use of preludes should be noted the splendid alternation of light with shadow. Before every vision of gloom and terror, the writer introduces a glimpse of the radiant glory that lies beyond. . . . The assurance of hope, the promise of victory . . . is offered anew with every new approach of trial. . . . Nothing could more clearly show that the supreme purpose of the book was to cheer and sustain through the awful troubles that were coming on the world."<sup>1</sup> Just so, in every time of trial, of delayed hope, of unfulfilled expectation, these chapters will do their work in heightening the Social Hope of all Christians. It is this which gives the Book of Revelation its unique and imperishable place in the literature of the soul. These chapters instead of being an interruption, belong just where they are, according to any true spiritual understanding alike of the book and of the needs of the human heart. Just as in the case of the previous interlude, this postponement of the final catharsis heightens the imagination and expectancy of the reader.

At the opening of chapter 10 the author tells us that he

<sup>1</sup> Beckwith, p. 245.

was about to proceed with his revelation of the last things and to interpret the voices of thunder which he heard when he was told to stop. He was not yet competent to utter these things. They would be revealed only when the last angel sounded. In the meantime he must himself "inwardly digest" these things before being competent to utter them. It is impossible to say just what were the contents of the little book, beyond that it contained the prophecies that were to follow. This chapter expresses in symbolic form the consciousness of the writer that his work here takes a fresh start which carries it to its consummation. Viewed in this light, the chapter which stands almost at the exact center of the book serves, as it were, as a "powerful clamp"<sup>1</sup> by means of which its different parts are held together. It looks back to chapter 1 where the prophet receives his first commission, and forward to all the coming mysteries of God.

After the prophet himself has thus been inwardly prepared to proceed, his hearers receive the assurance which they need. This is expressed in two short, eloquent visions, the spiritual signification of which constitutes an imperishable ground for the Social Hope, making the eleventh chapter one of the most eloquent in the entire book. The first of these visions occupies only the first and second verses. The prophet is told to measure the Temple, the altar, and them that worship there; but not to measure the outer court. There is, then, an outer court, and there is an inner shrine. Now there is no promise made about the outer court: "leave it without, measure it not." But the inner shrine, that he can measure; and the implication is that he will find the measures perfect: it will lie foursquare. The outer court may be destroyed, but the inner shrine is indestructible.

The original Jewish author of this inspired and comfortable parable doubtless wrote it with reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70. At that terrible time when under the armies of the Emperor Titus, the city and

<sup>1</sup> See Scott, Revelation, p. 205.

the Temple were laid low and devastated, he wrote to encourage the Jews to believe that though the nations, the Gentiles, the heathen, might ravage the outer and visible court of the Temple, they could never destroy the inner shrine of holiness, the altar and them that worship therein.

Those scenes were long past when the Christian author wrote this book of Revelation. Yet he preserves this little Jewish bit of inspiration for his own ends. It is not the Jewish city that is now threatened, but the early Christian community: the little handful of Christians who compose the seven churches of Asia, the groups of witnessing Christians at Ephesus, and Pergamum, and Thyatira. So when he uses the word *temple*, he is not thinking of the temple at Jerusalem, but he is thinking of these little churches, and the edifice of the Christian faith, and the separate lives of the Christian disciples. We remember how in the early chapters of the book the author has spoken of them as pillars in the Temple. It is in that sense that he uses the word. In those days of persecution and of martyrdom and of death, what he says is this: The outer court may be ravaged by our oppressors; it may be cast out; our assemblies may be broken up; our leaders may be put to death; our services may be suppressed; our bodies may be destroyed. These have been given over unto the nations and for forty-two months—definite time, that is—they will tread these holy things under foot. But measure the inner shrine, measure the altar, and you will find that it has been preserved inviolable and intact. The body of the Christian confessor may be destroyed, but not his soul. The church building may be ruined, but not its faith. The church community may be destroyed, but not its hope. These are the inner shrine. These are inviolable and indestructible. Fathom if you can the bottomless comfort which such an assurance brought to the persecuted Christians for whom this book was written.

Those days of the Book of Revelation lie far behind us. Nero is no longer on his throne; the hand that was raised

to destroy the Christian church lies mouldering in the dust. The church of Christ goes marching on down through the ages. Consider how immortal is this message of the indestructible inner shrine which remains in the midst of the devastation by the nations of the outer court of the temple of God! What wonderful confirmations of the truth of this parable have been given us through the ages of history even down to our own time!

1. Let the temple stand for the *soul of a nation*. What does the parable in these two verses tell us? It tells us that the outer court may be ravaged by the oppressors; they can turn it into a charnel-house and a shambles; they can profane it and trample it under foot for a set time. There remains the inner shrine; there remains the soul of the people. Measure it and you will find it preserved. Nothing has destroyed it. Nothing can destroy it. It remains untouched and inviolable. The soul of Belgium, France, Armenia—that is the inner shrine. The soil of Belgium, that is the outer court. For forty-two months and a little over that outer court was profaned by every injury and insult that could be heaped upon it. It was trodden under swine's feet and made a heap of mud and indescribable refuse. Its cities were given over to the nations and they visited them with every manner of injury that the cunning hate and ingenious deviltry of man could devise. Woods and orchards were turned into charred acres of land. Meadows and gardens look as if they had been devastated by a blast of Sahara. But the soul of Belgium! Did anything touch it? Measure it. It lies foursquare. The soul of France! was it destroyed? Measure it. Does it fail to meet the test? "And there was given to me a reed like a rod."

2. Apply this to the Christian faith, to the Christian teaching, to the Christian church. Here also there is the inner shrine and the outer court. Remember this, and you will be given comfort and hope in many a dark and dreary day. That outer court began to be invaded long ago. The heathen

had begun to desecrate the outer precincts. They were pulling down the walls and bulwarks of faith. Wise men had begun to substitute evolution for God; they substituted science for faith; they put up progress in the place of providence. They attacked the supernatural and called it a myth; they attacked the Scriptures and called it all a pious tradition; they attacked the authenticity of the Gospels and reduced them, as they thought, to ruins. There did not seem to be much left of the outer courts. The nations were trampling under feet what the saints had thought to be the most indestructible creeds and unassailable propositions. Many had taken alarm and felt as if the edifice of faith were doomed to destruction. Then came the World War in 1914; then came the spectacle of 300,000,000 Christians trying to exterminate each other. The hounds of hell were let loose by those who had confessed themselves to be followers of the meek and lowly Jesus. And the scorers laughed aloud at the bitter mockery and the hideous grinning skull of what looked like colossal Christian hypocrisy, and they poured contempt upon the Christian teachings and the Christian churches that had failed to prevent so infernal a tragedy. Yet all the while there was the inner shrine; there was the inviolable essence of the Christian faith; there was the soul of Jesus. Has anything touched the soul of Jesus? We have read of a church building in France which was made a charnel-house by German shells. Walls were battered in; ruins of plaster and glass lay all over the floor; a huge beam rested over the altar. But in the midst of it there was the crucifix, unharmed, untouched. And the cross of Christ has remained untouched alike by the debates of the wise men, by the wisdom of the scientists, and by the hand of Hun and of vandals. "And there was a reed given me like a rod." The worshipping soul of man, and the eternal soul of Christ—these are the inner shrine.

3. Or here is the church. How men have criticized it! Baiting the church is the easiest and commonest sport of the



day. Every one has to have a fling at it. Every one has to throw some insulting word at it. Every one must find fault with it. How worn-out are its creeds; how barren its services; how wooden its ministers; how impotent its witnesses; how insignificant and negligible its influence! Its outer court has been trampled all over and criss-crossed by profane and insulting mockery. Many have told us that the World War has completed its ruin. Never again can it pretend to be what it was. Its pretensions have been unveiled; its hypocrisies have been exposed. Other organizations have taken its place. The Red Cross has usurped its function. But do not forget that there is still the inner shrine where the worshipper meets his Lord:

“There is a spot where spirits blend,  
Where friend holds fellowship with friend;  
Though sundered far, by faith they meet  
About the common mercy-seat.”

Nothing has touched that; nothing can touch that. Think of the soldier who wrote his mother to remember him at Communion on Easter Day, and then went out to die. “And there was given to me a rod.” The inner shrine has remained inviolable.

4. Inviolable also are the souls of men. The outer court is the body. Disease and violence have destroyed it. What unspeakable things have been done to men’s bodies! They have been torn, mangled, starved, shot, blown to atoms, strangled. But the soul! Bring out the measuring-rod. “He that dwelleth in the secret place, . . . no harm can come nigh that dwelling.” The soul is inviolable.

“Souls of the Righteous in the hand of God,  
Nor hurt, nor torment cometh them anigh;  
O happy, happy immortality,  
Souls of the Righteous in the hand of God.

"Souls of the Righteous in the hand of God,  
 To eyes of men unwise, they seem to die;  
 They are at peace, O fairest liberty,  
 Souls of the Righteous in the hand of God.

"On earth as children, chastened by Love's rod,  
 As gold in furnace tried, so now on high,  
 They shine like stars, a golden galaxy,  
 Souls of the righteous in the hand of God."

Such is the immortal Social Hope of the vision of the inner shrine.

A similar truth is contained in the second vision of the indestructible witnesses. Three great characters in the Old Testament were believed never to have died, Enoch (Gen. 5:24), Moses (Deut. 34:5), and Elijah (II Kings 2:11). Hence arose the idea that they could return at any time (Deut. 18:18; Zech. 4:12; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 17:3). According to early Christian apocalypses, they were to reappear for the purpose of opposing and conquering the Anti-Christ, and to deliver Christians from his wiles. So in this passage, the persecuted Christians are encouraged by the example of these typical witnesses of the Jewish tradition (the number is reduced from three to two) who in miraculous manner are preserved from destruction during the time of their ministry. After their witness has been given, they are to be destroyed and lie unburied while the "men of the nations" rub their hands and congratulate themselves that they are dead. Then God will bring them to life to the terror of their enemies, before whose eyes they will ascend to heaven.

The plain lesson to be conveyed to the persecuted Christians to whom the Book of Revelation was written, is this: Rome may threaten you with destruction, but you can never die until your testimony is in. Then you may indeed be killed. But, while your enemies may have power over your bodies, they can never destroy your souls. You, yourselves,

are in reality indestructible, and at the resurrection day your enemies will be confounded at seeing you rise to life immortal. For a beautiful elaboration of this idea the reader is referred to the apocryphal book, the Wisdom of Solomon, chapter 5:1-5.

This teaching of the indestructibility of the witnesses of God has also immense social value for our own time and for all time. Let a man witness for God, and his witness cannot be destroyed. You may destroy his arguments, but you cannot destroy him. You may flout his reasoning, but you cannot do away with the man himself. That life is an unanswerable argument. The prophets and the apostles were killed; the truth which they enshrined and illustrated has lived victoriously. John Brown's body may lie mouldering in the dust, but not the idea for which he stood. On John Wesley's tomb in the Abbey stand the words: "God buries his workmen, but carries on his work." The words of Arthur J. Clough are eternally true: "Though we perish, truth is so." George Eliot may not have spoken the whole truth about immortality in her "Choir Invisible," but she gave unforgettable expression to a part of it. It is possible to "make undying music in the world."

Akin to the social value of this idea is the thought that each man is immortal till his work is done. Until they have finished their testimony, God's witnesses shall live. Whenever, that is, a true servant of God dies, we may have the assurance that the peculiar contribution which it was his moral destiny to make, has been made. Jesus gave confirmation to this idea in his oft-repeated assertion that his enemies could not take Him because his "hour was not yet come." When at last they did crucify Him, He could say, "It is finished." There is no promise here for any except his witnesses. But for them and for those who love them, it is an assurance of immense worth. It may not always be easy or even possible to see in the case of many who die when they are young, what that contribution is, or why, had they lived,

it would not have been completed or perfected. But it is our faith to hold that no life can be touched until its witness is complete. Such consolation belongs to all those whose dear dead lie by the thousands on the battlefields of Flanders and of France.

Contrast also the ultimate salvation and glory of those who have borne their witness with the dismay of those who have tried to put them to death. "And their enemies beheld them." Think of what that means. Think of the multitudes all through Christian history who have died insignificant, lonely deaths, unnoticed, forgotten, neglected. Even their names have not come down to us. Think of the soldiers who died overseas by the thousands, whose identification tags were lost, their bodies thrown indiscriminately together in a confused, indistinguishable mass; not even a grave for each, to say nothing of anything to mark such a grave. And then I read:

I heard a great voice from Heaven, saying, Come up hither; and they went up to Heaven on a cloud and their enemies beheld them, and gave glory to the God of Heaven.

This is the spiritual hope of each faithful life. No matter how lonely or neglected it may seem to be, it will have its resurrection day, it will be gathered up into glory, and the foes it so bravely faced, who may seem to have overcome it, will know its triumph and give glory to the God of Heaven.

Chapter 10:1. Then I was on the earth again and saw an angel come down from heaven. His garment was a cloud, on his head was a rainbow, his face shone as the sun, and his feet as columns of fire. 2. In his hand was a small open scroll. In size he was so immense that he stood over land and sea, 3. and his voice was like the roar of a lion. When he spoke, it thundered seven times. 4. I was about to write what these thunder-voices said when I was forbidden to do so. 5. And the great angel solemnly lifted his hand to heaven and took oath that there should be no more delay, 7. but that when the seventh angel sounded his trumpet, the secret purposes of God would be fulfilled. 8. And the voice from heaven commanded me to eat the scroll

which the great angel held in his hand. 9, 11. I did so, and found, as I had been told, that it was at first sweet to receive the very words of God, but that the more they were pondered, the more bitter was the mission to pronounce the woes and denunciations which they contained in the ears of many peoples.

Chapter 11:1, 2. And in a vision I was told to measure the sanctuary and to count the worshippers that were in it, and to see how safe and complete they were whatever might happen to the outer confines of the Temple. 3-6. And I was told that power of life would be given to God's witnesses who in sombre raiment would prophesy for a time and walk unharmed through all perils and perform all miracles until their ministry was fulfilled. 7, 8. Then they will be killed by the satanic power that will make war against them, 9. and for a time they will lie unburied 10. while their enemies mock them and congratulate one another. 11, 12. Then God will give them a glorious resurrection to the consternation of their enemies, 13. and an earthquake will cause widespread destruction. In terror, the rest will give glory to God. 14. The second series of judgments is now over. The third is about to begin.

*Notes* **v. 1** For the description of the strong angel, compare that of Christ (1:15-16) and see also Ps. 104:3; Ezek. 1:28; Matt. 17:2. No special significance is to be sought in these attributes. The general idea of heavenly glory is conveyed by them. **v. 2** The **scroll**. The words **little** and **open** (Ezek. 2:10) to distinguish it from the great roll of chapter 5, which was closed. **v. 3** For the figure of the lion, cf. Amos 3:8; Hos. 11:10. For the seven thunders, see Ps. 29:3-9. Some popular conception of thunder unknown to us underlies this obscure reference.<sup>1</sup> The number **seven** is doubtless used to express completion. Their utterance contains the final judgments which the author cannot describe (Dan. 12:4-9) until he has been recommissioned. It is useless to press too closely the relation to each other of the message of the angel, the thunders and the little book. One melts into the other and the general purpose is plain. **vv. 5-6** For this form of oath, see Dan. 12:7; Gen. 14:22; Deut. 32:40. The word **time** signifies delay. (See Matt. 24:48; Heb. 10:37.) **v. 7** The word **mystery** is

<sup>1</sup> Beckwith, pp. 574, 577-8.

commonly used in the New Testament to describe the purpose of God, hidden for a time but eventually to be made manifest, of salvation in Christ. (cf. Rom. 16:25; I Cor. 2:7.) In Eph. 3:4ff it is used of the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God. Here it is used inclusively of the consummation of the kingdom. **v. 8ff** For the Old Testament original of the idea of eating a message, cf. Ezek. 2:8-3:3. (cf. Jer. 15:16, 20:9; Job. 23:12.) The symbolism of eating is the entire appropriation and personal assimilation of the word of God. The idea that the taste of the book was bitter as well as sweet is a characteristic addition of the author of Revelation, and gives warning of the woes which are to come. Also it is spiritually very suggestive.<sup>1</sup> "The actual living taste of a Divine communication is sweet," but when we come to realize how the refusal of that invitation to men means their misery, the utterance of it is indeed bitter; it is sweet to receive the message of God's love, but to translate it in terms of every-day living involves bitter struggle.

Chapter 11:1-13. **vv. 1, 2** The original tradition upon which this prophecy is based is unknown to us. The idea of measuring is, of course, familiar from Ezek. chapters 40-43. Doubtless there was a Jewish apocalypse, written in view of some threatened conquest of Jerusalem (perhaps before 70 A.D.), and predicting, in accordance with the teaching of the prophets, that a remnant would be saved. This is used by our author not (as some commentators hold) to predict the ultimate repentance of Israel (Rom. chapters 9-11), but to assert by analogy the preservation of the Christian community. The word **altar** here stands for the altar of burnt-offering. (See Ezek. 43:13ff.) The idea of measuring the worshippers presents no difficulty since the measurement implies preservation. (cf. II Kings 18:22; Isa. 36:7; II Chron. 32:12.) For the outer court, cf. Ezek. 10:5. **Forty-two months**, or 1260 days, three and a half years, is the conventional apocalyptic period of the domination of evil before the end (cf. Dan. 7:25,

<sup>1</sup> See Deane, p. 114.



12:7 where "time" and "year" are synonymous). In all passages both in the Old Testament and in the New where these figures are used, this symbolic meaning is to be given them. Other symbolic numbers are four, seven, twelve, forty, seventy, familiar to all Bible readers. **vv. 3-13** The original tradition underlying this prophecy has already been suggested. (The reader will refer to Gen. 5:24; Deut. 18:15, 18, 34:6; II Kings 2:11; Zech. 4:2ff; Mal. 4:5-6; Mark 6:15, 8:28, 9:11-13; Matt. 11:14; John 1:21, 25, 7:40.) No names are here given to the witnesses. Our author is therefore not thinking of Moses or Elijah specifically, but of all who perform the functions of martyr-witnesses to the truth (cf. Matt. 17:10-13; Luke 1:17), and thus of the Christian martyrs to whom the book is addressed, and so of all Christian witness-bearers. Doubtless, as in the case of vv. 1, 2, an earlier apocalypse underlies this passage in which the Old Testament witnesses are to expose the errors of Anti-Christ and to deliver men from his power. Why Enoch seems to be omitted here we do not know unless by limiting the witnesses to Moses and Elijah as Law and Prophet, the complete testimony of the true faith is depicted. **v. 3** For the time indication here, see above. **v. 4 Standing before the Lord**, the true position of every prophet of God. **vv. 5, 6** (cf. II Kings 1:10; I Kings 17:1, 18:1; Luke 4:25; Jas. 5:17; Ex. 7:20). **v 7 The Beast.** The use of the word "beast" in the Book of Revelation may be summarized as follows: (1) In chapters 4 and 5, the correct reading is "living creatures" as in the Revised Version, and the word there has no connection with its meaning here and in later portions of the book. (2) All through ancient mythologies and Hebrew folklore, there ran the tradition of a monster, opposing himself to the ruler of the universe, and symbolizing in this opposition the eternal conflict between good and evil. (3) The word is used in this sense in Dan. 7, and is the prototype of our author's use of the word. (4) Our author uses the word in three distinct senses (a) of Satan as the personification of evil, as in chapter 13; (b) of Anti-

Christ as the embodiment of Satanic opposition in human form to Christianity. This figure of Anti-Christ is contemporary with the earliest years of the Christian era, owes its origin to Jewish demonology, and appears often in New Testament writings (cf. I John 2:18, II John 7; II Thess. 2:3). It is in the sense of Anti-Christ that the word is used in this chapter of Revelation. (c) Of the Roman emperor as the agent of Satan, as in chapters 13 and 17. **v. 8** The denial of burial was felt by the ancients to be the final insult (cf. I Kings 21:24; Jer. 8:1ff, 14:16). The term "great city" which here certainly means Jerusalem, elsewhere in Revelation means Rome. Jerusalem is frequently referred to as Sodom, but nowhere else as Egypt. **vv. 11, 12** (Cf. Ezek. 37:10; II Kings 13:21, 2:11.)

## CHAPTER X

### THE DRAGON AND THE BEAST

*Revelation, Chapters 11:15-19; 12, 13*

#### I. The Dragon

WE have now arrived at one of the passages in the Book of Revelation most difficult to understand, whether in its relation to the rest of the book or with respect to its own contents. Only a very careful mastering of the main outlines of the message, and a close examination of the way the mind of the author works, will enable the reader to understand either its place or its meaning. In the main, we find that the contents of the Book of Revelation fall into three sections. Of these the first, the study of which we have now completed, contains the introduction, and the chief judgments of God upon a wicked world (chapters 1-11); the second, to which we have now come, contains a description of the sufferings of the church, in the grip of the powers of evil (chapters 12-19); and the third which lies beyond describes the final victory of Christ and his followers (chapters 20-22).

We might have been led to expect that with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, after the second interlude, the final judgment would fall upon the world, and the trial of Christians would end and their victory would be assured. But evil is not so soon to be vanquished, and victory is not so easily to be won. Perhaps nothing in the whole book is so wonderful as the full justice which is done to the inveterate and apparently impregnable and invincible power of evil. It is true that Revelation is a book of magnificent optimism, and

that it ends in no stalemate, in no peace without victory, in no truce. The victory which it ultimately describes is absolute, not negotiated as between equals, but dictated by the Supreme power of righteousness whose undisputed and unique supremacy is acknowledged by all. But that victory is all the more impressive because it goes to the roots; because the struggle is carried to the very last strongholds of evil; because it does not end until the very principle and source of evil has been discovered and vanquished. It is this thoroughgoing treatment of the problem of evil in its relation to the Christian Idea which makes this book the final word of Social Hope. We love the book all the more because of its delayed promise and postponed day of victory. If it offered us anything less than the promise of the final overthrow of evil itself, it would not be what it is. Temporary victories are always possible in the sphere of history. Preliminary battles are being won every day on the field of time. But the Book of Revelation does not describe these. The Social Hope which it offers is not based on them. Rather it takes us by the hand and leads us through seas of blood and ages of soul-struggle up to the very capital of evil and has us witness its capitulation. What we see before this book ends, is not the surrender of the sword of some temporary power. We behold the surrender of Satan himself, who hands his sword over for all time to the all-conquering Christ. This is the ultimate truth which forms the foundation of a Social Hope which is eternal.

Let the reader once grasp the intention of the author of Revelation to pass beyond the particular and temporary opposition of the Roman Empire to the Christian cultus of the first century and to carry the war, as it were, into the very heart of the enemy's country, and the position and meaning of the following chapters, which every student of the book has found difficult and many have accounted hopeless, begins to be clear.

Introducing these chapters, we have first the hymn of praise with which the eleventh chapter closes. Like the Greek chorus

in a tragedy of Sophocles or Euripides, these anthems break forth more than once in the Book of Revelations (chapters 5:13, 14, 19:1-7). As the seventh angel sounds, there breaks forth first of all this great hymn of thanksgiving, and the doors of the Heavenly Temple swing open for a moment, and the ark of safety is revealed, and there are manifestations in heaven of the power of God.

The sounding of the trumpet, however, does not result in immediate, final judgment. Instead there follows chapter 12, admittedly one of the most obscure passages. We note the strange beginning. The author does not even say that he saw this vision. Alone of all the visions in the book it begins impersonally: "And there was seen." Again we have nothing in the Old Testament that will help us, nor anywhere in Scripture, nor even in history. Efforts to find analogies in Israel's escape from Egypt or in contemporary historical events have proved futile. But there are two points that may be held firm. First, the author is here describing the original and ultimate struggle between good and evil; and second, he is using for his source materials which are foreign to the Bible, and a tradition which is wholly unfamiliar to us. We do not know where he found these strange stories of the dragon and the woman and the child, nor do we know just how he meant them to be interpreted. It is very probable that this was not wholly clear to his own mind. Imagination, and particularly apocalyptic imagination, moves in the realm of general ideas which gather in confused mass in the mind of the writer, and are portrayed with a vague and perhaps despairing effort at verbal description, and are left to be their own interpreters of the germinal truth which agitates the soul of the writer.

The most plausible explanation of chapter 12 is this.<sup>1</sup> (1) Ancient mythology has much to say of the aggressive power of the Dragon (Chaos) against the older and aboriginal gods; it tells us of the birth of the sun-god (so in Greek mythology,

<sup>1</sup> Porter, pp. 236-240.

of the birth of Apollos whose mother was persecuted by the dragon Pythos); and of how this infant sun-god is rescued by his mother's flight from the assaults of the dragon which he slays when he is grown. (2) This bit of mythology was made use of by a Jewish tradition not found in Scripture. The woman now becomes the true Israel; the dragon is Satan; the child is the Messiah. The supernatural description of the woman is retained; Michael and his angels are introduced as conquering the dragon in heaven at the birth of the Messiah, and the Messiah himself is represented as slaying the dragon on earth. (3) Finally, this Christian author adapts these materials to his purpose which is (to repeat) to represent Christ as the ultimate symbol of good, vanquishing Satan, the ultimate symbol of evil. Apparently he makes little change in the general order of ideas. In the beginning of the chapter, the woman evidently stands for the true Israel which produced Christ. At the end of the chapter (v. 17) she has become the church, whose children keep the commandments of Jesus. The offspring of the woman are thus Christ and the servants of Christ, and the clue to the author's whole meaning is found in verses 10 and 11, where the victory of the Christian faith is hymned over its arch-enemy. This is the ultimate fact which Michael's conquest of the dragon and the escape of the child are supposed to symbolize.

It is a mistake to try to find a separate meaning in all the details of the chapter. The literalistic mind will make nothing of it whatsoever. The effort to find in other periods of history than that in which the prophet himself lived the events to which the figures refer, leads to nothing but confusion and total misunderstanding of the underlying and spiritual meaning of the chapter.

The chapter is obscure in its details because, as has already been stated, we do not know the original source from which the materials are taken. The author has been content to leave the traditional material as he found it; not because its meaning was always clear, perhaps even because its meaning



was *not* always clear. It served his purpose and pictorially it was very effective.

It is not difficult, however, to see that the teaching of this chapter must have been of immense encouragement to the persecuted Christians to whom it was written. It told them that the power that had warred against them had already been overcome in heaven; that the intensity of its warfare upon them was due to the fact that it realized this and knew that the time of its earthly triumph was brief; and that they had but to endure for a brief time in the name of Christ and victory would be theirs. The same teaching constitutes the Social Hope of the Christian to-day. The nature of evil is described in its ultimate terms. It is not a temporary and an historical fact out of which mankind may be expected to grow, from which he may hope in due time to graduate. The Book of Revelation knows nothing about evolutionary optimism, the easy persuasion that man will develop of himself into perfection. Evil is here portrayed as a power so malignant, and so rooted in the very constitution of the universe that it can be overthrown only by God Himself. That ultimate struggle is here described, and its outcome. Milton, as we all know, has made use of this passage in *Paradise Lost*, and pictures how Satan and his defeated hosts were cast into hell. Finally, the chapter gives us the picture of Christ, born of woman, as the hope of the world. Satan sought to destroy the young child, but He was caught away; and He shall rule the nations, and although his servants shall be persecuted by Satan for a time, they will ultimately "overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." Here are the truths of the chapter which are in perfect harmony with the teaching of the rest of the book and constitute its permanent social message to the Christians of its time and of all time.

Chapter 12:1. A great marvel was seen in the heavens: a woman clothed with the planets and crowned with the stars. 2. She cried out in the pains of child-birth. 3.

And another portent appeared, a great warlike dragon having the heads and horns and crowns that signify power and rulership. 4. His tail swept away a third of the heavenly host and flung them to the earth as he fell where the woman was about to give birth to her child. And he stood ready to devour it. 5. And she brought forth a son who was destined to have universal rule, and he was caught up for safety to the throne of God; 6. and the woman fled to the wilderness where God protected her during the three and a half years of the dragon's remaining power.

7, 8, 9. The fall of the dragon was the result of a conflict in heaven, where he and his followers made war on God. But Michael and his angels overcame him and threw him out of heaven and his angels with him. 10. And this victory was celebrated by a great song of praise because the Kingdom of God was rid by the power of Christ of this malignant foe that had unceasingly opposed the righteous. 11. In the end, those who loved Christ more than their own lives, overcame him by the death of Christ and their own sacrifice. 12. But heaven's gain meant loss to the earth, whose inhabitants must endure the concentrated anger of the dragon who knows that his power will not long endure.

13. For when the dragon realized this, his fury against the woman broke forth. 14-16. But her escape to the wilderness was aided supernaturally, and the attacks of the dragon were miraculously frustrated, and she was safe during the time of the dragon's rule. 17. He therefore vented his anger upon her children, those faithful Christians who must still endure persecution for a time.

*Notes v. 1 The woman* She cannot be identified with the mother of our Lord, since she is the mother of all Christians (v. 17) as well as of the Messiah. She may have been the church of the Old Testament in the original Jewish oracle which underlies this chapter. But our author plainly means in verse 13 and following, the church of the New Testament. It is safe, therefore, to have the woman stand for "the beloved community," the "ideal Zion," the symbol of God's people of both the Old and the New Testaments. See 3:9, 11:19, 15:5, 21:12-14, where the "true Israel" embraces alike the Jewish and Christian church. (cf. Isa. 54:1, 66:7-9; Gal. 4:26; II Esdras 10:7. Read Micah 4:9ff.) For Old Testament suggestions of the description of her heavenly glory, see Ps. 104:2; Song of Sol. 6:10; and Wisdom of Sol.

6:10. **v. 3 Dragon.** (See Job 7:12; Ps. 74:14; 89:10; Isa. 27:1, 51:9; Ezek. 32:2; Amos 9:3.) It was easy to identify this monster with the serpent of Eden and with the devil. The number seven signifies, of course, completeness, while the ten horns are taken from Dan. 7:7. The horn is a common symbol of might. **vv. 5, 6** The child is, of course, in the earlier verses, the Messiah of Jewish tradition. In the author's Christian use of that tradition, he is Christ. The reader will not look too closely in these verses for exact references to his earthly life (as for example the presecution of Herod (v. 13), the escape into Egypt (v. 14), or the ascension (v. 5). It is at least open to question whether the author had these events in mind. The whole description of the Messiah-child is not in the sphere of the temporal and the historical, but in the realm of the spiritual and eternal. **v. 6** The time-indication here as in v. 14 is the stereotyped apocalyptical period for the domination of evil. The central idea of this verse is that Satan fails in his attempt to destroy the Messiah. **vv. 7-9** Michael in the later Old Testament is the patron angel of Israel. (Dan. 10:21, 12:1.) **Serpent** It is an interesting illustration of the essential unity of the Bible that the serpent of Eden should reappear in the last book of the Bible, to be overcome by the child "born of woman." There is no contradiction between the Jewish conception of the expulsion of the dragon from heaven and the idea of the triumph of the Christian over him on earth. **vv. 15-17** This section follows logically after vv. 1-6. It will not do to base these verses on the story of Israel's escape from Egypt (cf. Ex. 19:4), for the details are very dissimilar, and the figure of eagles' wings was a common and frequent Old Testament simile (cf. Deut. 32:11; Isa. 40:31; Jer. 48:9). The author has taken his imagery not from the Old Testament but from some familiar legend. For the time three and a half years (v. 14), cf. above v. 6. That the author had the Genesis story consciously

in mind seems apparent from the expression "the rest of her seed" (v. 17) (cf. Gen. 3:15).

## II. The Beast

### Chapter 13

In approaching this chapter, also, we bear in mind the fact that the present purpose of the author is to describe the church as for the moment in the clutch of evil. It is a full statement of the resources of evil as they are brought to bear upon the Christian community. In chapter 12, that power of evil is traced back to its ultimate source; but the assurance is given that it has already been overcome in heaven, and can and will be overcome on earth if the servants of Christ will but hold fast for a time. In the conviction that "in the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," the author goes on in this chapter to describe how the intensified fury of the dragon will now fall upon the church and the witnesses of Jesus. This description is given in language so bizarre and fantastic as to baffle even the reader who has begun to be acclimated to the strange imagery of apocalyptic writing. His imagination is staggered by all this fantastic and up-heaped conglomeration of beasts that are killed and come to life, and of cryptic marks and numbers. He finds it difficult to take it all seriously, and is haunted by the suspicion that interpreters who try to find a key to all these puzzles are deceiving themselves as well as their readers. Without doubt patience is needed by the modern mind which never thinks in these forms and has habitually neglected all this kind of writing in Scripture itself. If the reader, however, determined to follow the story of this book throughout, and encouraged by such enlightenment as has already come to him, will carefully study this chapter, it also will be made to yield its secret which will be found to be no less precious than that which has gone before.

In general, then, the reader will understand that there is contained in this chapter the story of how the dragon, Satan, the power of evil on earth, sets about to persecute the children of God, the servants of Christ, the "seed of the woman." He makes the Roman Empire his agent for this persecution. The beasts of this chapter represent the Roman Empire in full action against the church, and thus stand for forces, personalities, institutions which were most real to the first readers of this book, however vague and unfamiliar they may appear to us. Here the imperial edict to worship the Emperor is set forth in all its horror.

In the next place, the reader must remember what has been repeatedly urged, that this kind of language was very familiar to the writer of this book and to those to whom it was first addressed. It is the conventional language of all apocalypses. Turn, for example, to the seventh chapter of Daniel and read it carefully, and then there will be little trouble with the main outlines of the chapter under discussion. In Daniel, as in Revelation, we are introduced to four beasts which come up from the sea. The first was like a lion, the second like a bear, the third like a leopard, and the fourth and the most dreadful of all was different from the rest and had teeth of iron, and in his fury devoured and stamped and broke in pieces all that opposed him. We read further (v. 15) that Daniel was perplexed and grieved in mind, just as we are, at these strange and savage beasts, and asked for an explanation of them, and the explanation was given.

These great beasts . . . are four kings which shall arise out of the earth (v. 17). And the fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom which shall devour the earth (v. 23). But the judgment shall sit, and they (the saints) shall take away his dominion to consume and destroy it unto the end.

No one, that is, who is familiar with the symbolism of the seventh chapter of Daniel can have any difficulty with the essential meaning of the thirteenth chapter of Revelation.

Just as the beasts of that chapter stood for the kingdoms of Babylon, of the Medes, of the Persians and of Syria, so the beast of this chapter in Revelation (incidentally alluded to in 11:7) stands for the Roman Empire in its different manifestations. The number of the beasts is reduced from four to two, and the only difficulties are those of detail and of the understanding not of the main outlines of the chapter, but of some of its special features.

A few of these may well receive attention at this point. Assuming that the beast which the author sees rising out of the sea is Rome, what is meant by the seven heads and ten horns and ten crowns? Fortunately, we are not left in doubt as to how these features are to be interpreted. If the reader will turn to chapter 17, vv. 7ff., he will find the explanation given there. The seven heads are expressly declared to be the seven hills of Rome, as typifying seven emperors; the horns are the ten emperors of Rome (whether we count from Julius Cæsar to Nero, or from Augustus to Vespasian); and the ten crowns are the symbol of their authority. It appears certain, therefore, that the beast symbolizes the Roman Emperors as Satan's agents in his war against the saints. Moreover, seven of these emperors are said (17:10) to have the "name of blasphemy," i. e. were worshipped as God (omitting, that is, Galba and Otto and Vitellius. See later in *Notes*, chapter 17).

But what is meant by the detail in v. 3, where we are told that one of the heads was wounded to death, and his wound was healed and the world wondered after the beast?<sup>1</sup> The most plausible and generally accepted explanation is that this verse refers to the legend about the death of Nero. He died by suicide, alone, in his villa in an obscure place. These circumstances made possible the circulation of rumors that he was not really dead at all, but had fled, and that some day he would return to wreak fearful vengeance upon Rome. These rumors spread with rapidity and persisted long after.

<sup>1</sup> Beckwith, pp. 400ff.



Decrees appeared in his name and imposters arose claiming to be Nero. Thus he came to be a mysterious and supernatural personality and in later Christian tradition was identified with Anti-Christ. Doubtless this idea was in existence at the time the Book of Revelation was written, and allusion is made to it in this verse.

A third detail, the most difficult of all found in this chapter, calls for special comment. It is contained in v. 18.

Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is six hundred, three score and six.

For a full discussion of this passage the reader is referred to the authorities.<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew and Greek languages the letters of the alphabet serve also as numbers, so that every name or even word has a numerical value. What the author says in this verse, therefore, is that the letters which make up the name of the beast yield the number six hundred and sixty-six. The only question is, therefore, what is the signification of this exact number, and to what person in contemporary history does it refer? Neither of these questions can be answered with exactness. With respect to the first, the most plausible explanation is that as the perfect number would be seven hundred and seventy-seven, this number which falls short of it denotes imperfection, or evil, just as eight hundred and eighty-eight, which the name of Jesus can be made to signify, surpasses it and denotes divine perfection. With respect to the second question, all sorts of efforts to find the name contained in the cryptogram have been made and will doubtless continue to be made. All of these are permissible so long as one limits one's inquiry to contemporary Roman history. When, however, one strays out into the broad field of human history and tries to make out that Mohammed or Luther or Napoleon is meant, one is departing from what we have seen to be the intention and purpose of Revelation.

<sup>1</sup> See Beckwith, pp. 403ff; Porter, pp. 246ff.

The consensus of the best opinion is that Nero Cæsar is meant. Other explanations are that the Latin Empire is meant, or chaos, or a combination of chaos and Nero. "Whatever we may now guess as to the number, we may rest assured that it is the past and not the future that hides the mystery of its meaning."

Two other features of this chapter may be discussed here. As we have seen, there are two beasts. How are these to be related to each other, understanding that the beast of verse 1 symbolizes the Roman Empire? What is the meaning of verse 11, "And I beheld another beast"? Here there are two possible explanations. One has been made by Ramsay.<sup>1</sup> Since in v. 12 it is expressly stated that the function of the second beast is to execute the authority of the first beast, he is of the opinion that the second beast typifies the civil and religious administration of the Roman Empire to which was entrusted the duty of carrying into effect the imperial decree of emperor-worship. On the whole, however, scholars are inclined to accept the second explanation.<sup>2</sup> Since the second beast is specially designated as a false prophet (v. 14), it is felt that he stands for the pagan priesthood, or "the special Roman functionaries charged with the maintenance and extension of emperor-worship throughout the Empire."

Finally, what shall we make of the mark (v. 16) which all must receive in order to purchase or to sell food?<sup>3</sup> This may mean that a stamp which Christians would consider to be idolatrous must be affixed to papers licensing buyers or sellers. Since this would be a tacit acknowledgment of emperor-worship, Asian Christians would be ruined financially by the infliction of this boycott upon traders who had not proved their loyalty to the emperor. It is possible, however, that the expression refers to a future or imagined branding of the emperor's name on the foreheads of those who refused to bow the knee to the emperor's statue. In this case how elo-

<sup>1</sup> Seven Cities, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> See Beckwith, p. 409.

<sup>3</sup> See Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 105ff.

quent becomes the word of promise more than once uttered in this book, "I will write upon him my new name" (cf. 17:5, 19:12, 22:4).

Truly, "here is the patience and faith of the saints"; here is the situation which calls for endurance and fidelity. We have described every form of persecution which can be brought to bear: violence, deceit, overmastering power, the relentless discovery of all who refuse to submit, starvation, and obloquy. The chapter will stand for all ages as the summary of all possible affliction. But in the center of it there stands always the shining hope. All of this evil is marked for destruction. Its triumph is brief. There is the Book of Life of the slain Lamb in which the names of God's followers are eternally inscribed. At this point we must stand, we must endure, we must be faithful. However powerless for the moment the cause of Christ may seem to be, in the end it shall prevail. If we were but able to take into our souls a tithe of the meaning of this chapter, it would be to us like iron in the blood. "Would that we could read this chapter with imagination vivid enough to enable us to do justice to the courage of those Christians in Asia! It would make us ashamed of our feebleness and cowardice where the cause of Christ is concerned. It is a summons to earnestness, to endurance, to faith. And now, as then, it contains the promise of ultimate victory."<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 13:1. Again, I stood on the seashore and I saw a huge beast come out of the sea, with all the marks of authority and power, and on his heads were blasphemous names. 2. In this beast were concentrated all the powers of evil of the four beasts of Daniel's vision, and his master, the dragon, gave him full authority and power. 3. One of his heads was apparently slain, but the wound was healed and the world went after him in wonder 4. and worshipped both the dragon and the beast, for men felt that there was no power on earth that could overcome him. 5, 6. And he was permitted to utter blasphemies against God and heaven for a limited time. 7. And the beast persecuted

<sup>1</sup> Deane, p. 155.

God's children and conquered them, and all the rest of the inhabitants of the earth. 8. And all men, except the elect of God, worshipped him. 9. Give ear to this. 10. If one is destined for captivity, to captivity he must go. If one resists death with the sword, he must himself be killed. Here is the opportunity to show endurance and fidelity. 11. And I saw another beast. This one came out of the earth; and he had lamb's horns, but his voice was the dragon's. 12. This was the agent of the first beast, and carried out his will and made men worship the beast whose wound was healed. 13, 14. He deceived men by use of supernatural powers, and bade them worship the beast, because he made them believe that he was really alive and could speak. 15. And he commanded that all should be killed who would not worship him. 16, 17. And he compelled men to worship him by making this worship a condition of getting the necessities of life. 18. Would you know who this beast is? His number is six hundred and sixty-six.

*Notes v. 1 And I stood* The Revised Version adopts an alternate reading: "And he stood." In this case the sentence belongs to the previous verse, and "he" refers to Christ. One reading is as good as the other. **The Beast** For this word and its use, cf. Note on chapter 11:7. In this chapter the word refers to the Roman Empire (v. 1) or the Roman emperor (v. 4ff). In the latter case, the beast is identical with Anti-Christ. The coming of the beast **out of the sea** is taken directly from Dan. 7:3, but ultimately from some myth of the beast as a sea-monster. In 11:7, 17:8, the beast comes from an abyss, because the actual author of evil is meant. **Seven heads** In 17:9, these are identified with the seven hills of Rome, as symbols of the seven emperors who received divine worship. **Ten horns** (see Dan. 7:7, 24). Here the number ten is used symbolically. All nations are to be subject to the beast (cf. 17:12). **Names of blasphemy**, i.e., divine titles taken by the Roman Emperors. **v. 2** This description combines the first three beasts of Daniel. (cf. Hosea 13:7ff.) The fourth beast of Daniel is represented by the ten horns. The meaning is that this beast is the concentration of all powers of evil. **v. 3** does not mean that the beast survives in spite of the loss of one of his heads. Rather in this verse and also in

v. 12 the beast is identified with the head, which here represents him. **v. 5** Taken from Dan. 7:8, 20, 25. **Great** here means proud. Note once more the conventional limit of the time of the power of evil. The point always is that there is to be an end to the sway of evil, and that that end is fixed. This note of hope is hardly absent from a single chapter in this book. **v. 6** Suggested by Dan. 7:25, 8:10. **v. 7** (cf. Dan. 7:21, 23. See also Rev. 5:9). **v. 8 Book of Life** (see on 3:5). Here as in 21:27 called the Lamb's Book. The words "Lamb slain" may possibly be an interpolation. In any event the words "from the foundation of the world" are to be joined with "written." The names of the faithful have been there from the beginning. **v. 10** The probably correct reading of this verse has been suggested in the text. Christians are here urged to avoid the use of force in resisting persecution. Not violence, but patient endurance will bring the victory. (cf. Matt. 26:52.) **v. 11** By coming out of the earth, the human nature of this beast is possibly indicated. This beast also is lamb-like in power as contrasted with the might of the first beast (v. 2), and speaks with the guile of the serpent, and not with the loud voice of blasphemy. **v. 12 Before him**, i.e., as in the presence of his master. (cf. Lk. 1:75; I Kings, 17:1.) **vv. 13-15** (cf. II Thess. 2:9; Mark 13:22; II Kings 1:10, 12.) **vv. 14b-15** refer to the Nero-myth, and to the Christian tradition of Nero as re-incarnate in Anti-Christ. "Legends of statues assuming the functions of life are familiar in antiquity (as Pygmalion and Galatea), and even in the saints-legends of the mediæval church." **v. 16 The mark** On the whole, the idea of branding seems most likely. Devotees of a god were accustomed to brand themselves with his mark. cf. Is. 44:5 (R. V. margin). This practice is doubtless referred to in Gal. 6:17. Akin to this is the custom of branding slaves with the mark of their master. There is no evidence, however, that any edict contained this demand for compulsory branding. It may have been used

figuratively by the author to denote that all must give evidence of loyalty. **v. 18 Understanding**, i.e. skill in deciphering the meaning of the number, cf. Dan. 9:22. **Count** in this connection means calculate.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE BEGINNING OF THE END

#### *Revelation, Chapters 14, 15, 16*

THE reader will bear in mind what the purpose of the author of the book has been from chapter 9 onward. That purpose, as we have seen, is to carry the conflict back to its original sources, to trace it to its very roots, and to point out that the victory with which the book is to end is no temporary triumph, but the final conquest of the very principle of evil by God and by the all-conquering Christ.

The author prepares for this culminating portion of this great spiritual drama by receiving a fresh commission to utter these sublime prophecies (chapter 10). Then he reassures his readers of the safety of God's servants in the midst of the terrific impact between the forces of good and evil which is to follow by the vision of the inner shrine and the indestructibility of the witnesses of God (chapter 11:1-13). Then, after a brief passage in which we hear a hymn of ascription to God, and behold for a moment the ark of safety in the temple of heaven (chapter 11:14-19), we are led back in imagination to the original conflict between God and Satan and are told how Satan, vanquished in heaven, is permitted for a time to persecute with venomous hatred the children of God and the servants of Christ on earth. That persecution which now falls upon the early Christians of the primitive church is told in detail in chapter 13. The beast of the Roman Empire, receiving full authority from Satan, commands them to worship the Roman emperor upon penalty of death. This persecution they must endure with

patience and fortitude, knowing that they are the elect of God and that one day the beast is to be overcome.

We now arrive at the point when that final battle is to take place which will result in casting the beast into the lake of brimstone and fire, and in the salvation of the children of God. For the description of this great battle scene, the author makes elaborate preparation. First, he gives us a beautiful picture of the followers of the Lamb as they are gathered, faultless, before the throne of God (chapter 14:1-5). Next he issues, as it were, a great proclamation, heralding the beginning of this tremendous conflict and warning all to flee from the wrath to come (chapter 14:6-20). Then we have the final series of judgments, depicted in the emptying of the seven bowls (chapters 15 and 16). After another hallelujah chorus, the angels of God come forward and at the word of command they empty the vials of the final judgments of God upon the world (chapter 15:4-8, and chapter 16). Let us take up each one of these sections in turn.

### 1. *The Vision of the Redeemed* (Chapter 14:1-5)

As we have already noted, it is the habit of the author to contrast shadow and light. Over against the picture of evil there is continually set the shining hope of ultimate victory. This fact in itself constitutes one of the fundamental spiritual messages of the book. We are never allowed to forget for a moment what the ultimate outcome is to be. When things are at their worst, some message always pierces the darkness. Either we have given to us a short, sharp summons to endurance, or a parable of assurance, or a hymn of victory breaks in triumph over our bewildered minds, or the doors of heaven swing open for a moment and we see the ten thousand times ten thousand who have endured to the end and have received the crown of life. This alternation of darkness and light makes up the social message of the Book of Revelation. It is essentially a tract for hard times.

It is a book for the social worker to read. He can match the darkness of those days with the darkness which he feels; the burden which lay upon those souls with the burden which lies upon his own. He knows that he is not called upon to endure any worse trials than those which are depicted in this book. But underneath it all and over it all and running through it all, there is the spiritual assurance, the note of victory, the knowledge that in a sense the fight already has been won and that for him there remains only the duty to endure to the end. This is the summons which cannot be resisted. The fact that the life of faithful endurance, of refusal to bow the knee to Baal, and the willing acceptance of any sacrifice which this loyalty entails numbers us among the followers of the lamb now and forever in an imperishable appeal and a promise of infinite hope.

This vision of the redeemed presents only a few features which demand special mention. What does the author mean by Mount Zion? Are we to think of it as in heaven or on earth? Here there is much difference of opinion.<sup>1</sup> It is doubtless true that anywhere in the Old Testament and in the Jewish apocalypses, the name, synonymous with Jerusalem, denotes the earthly and Messianic kingdom. (Joel 2:32; Isa. 24:23; Mic. 4:7; etc.) In Heb. 12:22 it is also true that Mount Zion is the perfect archetype of the earthly Jerusalem and not heaven as the abode of God. In this book the author may be thinking of such an earthly Zion in a redeemed world. Yet even with him it takes on heavenly features, and for us it is impossible to think of anything save the heavenly Jerusalem. It is not, therefore, a question which it is important, even if it were possible, for us to decide. In the second place, how are we to understand the number 144,000? Some feel that this number stands symbolically for a select company of those who are specially distinguished by their holiness. But the simpler interpretation is that it stands

<sup>1</sup> See Beckwith, p. 646.

for the whole body of the sealed and the redeemed.<sup>1</sup> (See chapter 7.) The clause defining their chastity is probably to be taken literally. As over against the prevailing immorality, the prophet thus depicts their ascetic purity. It is to be noted, however, that there is nothing in the book to show that celibacy was a part of our author's moral ideal.

The close parallelism between this section and the preceding chapter will not escape the reader's attention. Over against the mark of the beast, Christ's followers have the Father's name on their foreheads. The worshippers of the beast declared that no one could war against him; and here the redeemed sing the might of God before his throne. And both chapters begin abruptly: "And I stood and saw a beast." "And I looked, and lo, a Lamb."

Chapter 14:1. Then in contrast to the beast and his worshippers, I saw Christ in the heavenly Jerusalem surrounded by the whole number of the redeemed who were marked as belonging to God. 2, 3. And I heard the reverberation of many voices, accompanied by music, singing a song before God which only the redeemed could understand. 4. These have kept themselves from every manner of evil and they shall follow Christ always.

*Notes v. 1 The Lamb* This is the common designation of Christ in Revelation. The names Jesus or Christ is used but five times, and the name Lord once. In all other cases the Lamb is used (28 in all), and always in the most august scenes. The reference is plainly to the redeeming work of Christ, since this book is a Gospel of Redemption. The glorified Christ is He who has suffered death to redeem the people of God. Outside of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel, the word is used but once in the New Testament, I Pet. 1:19. **vv. 2-3** "Who the singers are is left indefinite as in 11:16, 12:10, 19:6. Probably they are the . . . hosts of angels." (cf. 7:11; Lk. 15:10.) **v. 4** The specific addition of the words "with women" excludes a metaphorical use of this

<sup>1</sup> See Beckwith, pp. 648, 650.

expression. This verse and that which follows contains an admonition to all who would share the glory of the redeemed.

2. *Last warnings.* (Chapter 14:6-20)

We have here a series of short warnings or proclamations in which, as it were, the field is cleared for action. These announcements are made in the most solemn manner, seven times over. First, an angel is seen flying in mid-heaven with the glad tidings that judgment is near and calling upon all to repent (vv. 6, 7). This glad tidings is the burden of the book. It constitutes the hope of its social message. "The hour of judgment is come." It is in this conviction that all workers for truth and righteousness can continue to endure. These tidings are like the word coming to an army that has struggled to the limit of its strength, that the hour of victory is at hand. It requires no imagination to understand what these glad tidings meant to those early Christians. They bring the same hope to us to-day. Again, a second angel proclaims the impending fall of Rome, the agent of Satan and the implacable foe of the people of God (v. 8). Let us remember what reaches of faith and spiritual confidence were needed to make such a proclamation while Rome still stood apparently invincible, with God's people helpless in its grasp. It is a verse for all to lay to heart at some similar moment of contrast between truth on the scaffold and wrong on the throne. To the eye of this prophet, Rome in the sight of God had already fallen. Its death-blow had already been given. We must believe as he did.

"For right is right since God is God  
And right the day must win;  
To doubt would be disloyalty,  
To falter would be sin."

A third angel pronounces sentence on the beast and all who worship him (vv. 9-11). Here we have the reversal of the

situation described in 11:7-10 and 13:12-17. Let it not be forgotten that terrible as are these descriptions of the punishment of evil, they do stand for spiritual realities. It is, after all, a weakened sense of sin and of the moral law which has banished from the modern mind the impression of any meaning in these symbols of divine retribution. If we had even a partial conception of the physical and mental agonies endured in this life by those who have persistently violated the laws of nature and of God, and of spiritual remorse which like the furies pursues many an outraged conscience, we should be in a better position to grasp the reality here depicted: "an anguish which only spirits can know; the sense of something lost, endless discontent for what has been exchanged for it, the undying worm of conscience." The author himself repeats a warning which he had already uttered in the previous chapter (cf. v. 12, 13:10). Here, he says, is the opportunity which the servants of Christ have to exhibit their powers of endurance. Among all forms of witness-bearing, none perhaps is more effective than simple continuance in faithful living. Not to be weary in well-doing is the final demonstration of true sainthood. It has been the perseverance of the saints more than any other single quality which has borne effective witness to the realities of faith. A voice from heaven then pronounces a blessing on the martyred dead (v. 13). This is one of the most familiar verses in the Bible. It is made sacred for us by its use to-day when we come to lay away our dead. But how its spiritual eloquence and meaning are heightened when we understand the circumstances which first caused it to be uttered! Imagine what these words meant to those who first read them. And it is our hope to-day that nothing is lost in the lives of those who bear faithful witness to Christ. "They rest from their labors but their works follow with them" (R. V.). Nothing in the realm of righteousness is ever lost. Every right word, deed, and thought is eternally conserved and has its permanent place in a world that shall endure long after the



visible world has ceased to be. This is the blessing of those who die in the Lord. They and their works are imperishable.

He that doeth the will of God abideth forever. (I John 2:17.)

A vision of the Messiah as harvester, reminiscent of Daniel and of the parable of the tares, then follows (vv. 14, 16); and another, reminding us of a familiar passage from Joel (3:13), pictures God trampling his foes under his feet in the winepress of his wrath (vv. 18-20). It is not necessary to separate these two in our thought of what they represent. Harvest and vintage together represent the gathering of all mankind before the judgment seat of God. It is a carrying over to the moral field the lesson of nature. The natural year is a parable of personal and of human history. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." It is a final repetition of a solemn lesson taught by the prophets and reinforced by Christ of the gathering of the wheat into the heavenly garner, but casting out to be trodden under foot that which was worthless in his sight. No one can fully understand the graphic symbolism of the winepress who has not witnessed an oriental actually treading the juice from the grape. The prophet Isaiah has made use of it in a well-known passage (chap. 63:1-6) to describe the divine wrath. Doubtless our author had it in mind when he wrote. It is needless to add that Julia Ward Howe found in this passage from Revelation the inspiration for her opening verse of the Battle Hymn of the Republic.

Chapter 14:6, 7. I saw an angel flying across the skies and proclaiming the everlastingly glad tidings that men must now, if ever, repent, since the hour of judgment has at last arrived. 8. Another angel followed proclaiming, as if it had already happened, that Rome has fallen because of her sins. 9-11. A third angel told of the endless torments reserved for the idolatrous worshippers of the beast, and for all who are marked with his name. 12. Here appears the opportunity for the fidelity and endurance of the people of God. 13. Then a voice from heaven spoke of

the blessedness of those who were willing even to die for Christ's sake. Their toils are over and all that they have been and all that they have done goes on, undying, with them. 14. Then I saw a figure like the Son of Man appearing on a cloud, crowned like a king, and holding a sickle in his hand. 15. And when an angel bade him, he reaped what was ripe from the earth. 16-20. Still another angel, when commanded to do so by an angel who had power over fire, gathered the grapes of the earth and cast them into the winepress of the wrath of God whence a flood of wine, like blood, flowed over all the earth.

*Notes* **v. 6 Everlasting Gospel** Not the gospel of grace, but the glad tidings that God's purpose for his people is about to be accomplished (cf. Mark 1:15). **v. 8 Babylon** formed the ancient parallel to Rome. In all later Jewish apocalypses (probably also in I Pet. 5:13) Babylon became the mystic name for the city of Rome. The language here is taken directly from Isa. 21:9. (cf. Jer. 50:2, 51:8.) Two ideas are blended in the phrases which follow: Rome's enticement of other nations to idolatry and immorality, and the cup of the wrath of God (cf. Jer. 25:15; Job. 21:20, etc.) **vv. 10-11** Unending torment in fire is the conventional punishment everywhere in apocalyptic literature, and so in the sayings of Christ, assigned to Satan and his followers. No theory of "everlasting punishment" is thus to be read into the words. The phrase "in the presence of the Lamb," suggesting that the bliss of the faithful is in full sight, reminds us of Lk. 16:23. **v. 13 from henceforth**, i.e. all through the ages; **works follow with them** (cf. II Esdras 7:35). "The work shall follow and the reward shall be showed, and good deeds shall awake." **vv. 14-20** What is here revealed in anticipating visions is fully described in chapters 19-20. Both of these figures of the harvest and of the wine-press are familiar to Bible readers, and both are descriptive of the same event. **v. 14 Son of Man** Taken from Dan. 7:13. The description here makes it probable that the Messiah and not an archangel is meant. The fact that he is told by another angel to thrust in the sickle does not present an insuperable

difficulty, since this latter angel evidently speaks for God Himself. (cf. John 5:19, and Acts 1:7.) For a similar description of the coming of the Son of Man, see Matt. 24:30, 26:64. **v. 15ff** (cf. Joel 3:13.) **vv. 17ff** (cf. Joel 3:13; Gen. 49:11; Isa. 63:2-4; Lam. 1:15.) The connection of this vision with the preceding one is clear. The first pictures the whole judgment by Christ, and the second a particular part of it, viz. the vengeance of God upon the wicked executed by an angel (Matt. 13:41, 49). **v. 18** "from the altar." This angel comes from the altar of incense to show that the prayers of the saints are about to be answered. **Power over fire** This detail is not clear, but the author's purpose may be to associate him with the burning fires of incense which ascend with the prayers of the saints. **v. 20 without the city** refers probably to the traditional conception of the defeat of the enemies of Israel near Jerusalem. **A thousand and six hundred furlongs**—the symbolical representation of a vast field of blood. It is not possible to say just why this particular number is used.

### 3. *The Final Judgments* (Chapters 15 and 16)

We come at last to the long-delayed third series of judgments. They had been heralded by the blowing of the seventh trumpet-blast in chapter 11:15, and they look forward to the final events in this great drama of judgment, the destruction of Rome and the consummation of the moral order. Like the first and second series of woes it will describe a terrible and supernatural punishment of the world. Unlike them, however, it will eventuate in the final establishment of the kingdom of God upon earth.

Certain difficulties are presented to the reader by this third series of woes. For one thing, it has been so long delayed that one may have forgotten that it had not yet taken place. The reasons for this delay have, however, already been stated. Just because these are the final judgments, they are ap-

proached with deliberation, and the author must make clear that the struggle is carried back from the field of contemporary history, to the very origins of Satan's opposition to God. Again, the absence of the special designation of these woes by the sounding of the seventh trumpet (chapters 8:13; 10:7) is somewhat perplexing. In place of this, we have seven angels (chapter 15:1), with the seven last plagues. This third series of judgments, then, takes its place as the seventh in the list of trumpet-plagues, but by the change of form is symbolized its completeness. No other series is to follow. A third difficulty is this: as these judgments are the climax of all the others, we should naturally expect them to be more terrible than those which precede them, and to be in a class, as it were, by themselves. Instead of this, they are less detailed and less vivid and impressive in their imagery and even appear to repeat the punishments that followed the sounding of the six trumpets. Are we to suppose that the author has, so to speak, exhausted his vocabulary and his powers of imagination—that he has nothing new that he can tell us? A more likely hypothesis is this: that in the preceding series, the judgments are confined to the description of the punishments themselves. In this case, however, the mind of the author runs rapidly forward to the consummation—the casting of Satan into the bottomless pit, the general Resurrection, and the final blessedness of the Redeemed. The real climax, that is, to the emptying of the seven bowls is not to be found in chapter 16, but in chapters 17-20. There we have new and distinctive material, to which chapters 15 and 16 are a mere prelude.

Another difference between this third series and the series of the seals and the trumpets is to be noted. Each of these is divided into two sections, first of four visions, then of three which are different in character. When the seals were opened, we had four horsemen and then the souls of the slain, an earthquake, and the seventh seal opening up to the first trumpet. Similarly, when the trumpets were sounded, we

had four plagues, then a falling star, an army of cavalry, and the seventh trumpet leading up to the final wars. But in the case of the seven bowls, the judgments are all alike and the seventh bowl is poured out like the rest. Then an angel is ready to show to the prophet the complete destruction of Rome, the final collapse of evil.

When chapter 15 opens announcement is made of the approach of the seven last plagues, in which the wrath of God is at last completely expressed and accomplished. As so often before, there is light before darkness. We hear, before these bowls of wrath are emptied, a hymn of praise by the saints of God who are seen standing in heaven as victors over the beast and glorifying God for his acts of righteous judgment. It is a familiar hymn, as old as Moses and yet finding its completion in the redemption of Christ. Then, with solemn pomp and majesty the sanctuary of heaven is seen and seven angels appear with garments of white and wearing (cf. 1:13) girdles of gold. From the presence of God Himself and by the hand of one of the four living creatures that stand nearest to Him, there are handed to these angels seven vessels filled full with the wrath of God. A great cloud, the symbol of God's presence and power, fills his temple, and God's own voice bids the angels go forth and empty the vessels of his wrath. This they do and plagues follow which remind us of the plagues of Egypt and are not dissimilar to those which resulted from the sounding of the trumpets. There are two brief interludes in chapter 16. The first occurs in vv. 5-7 when the angel of the rivers and the angel of the altar join in praising God for his judgments. The second is contained in v. 15, where the prophet inserts in the name of the Lord a warning to be ready because of the suddenness of the advent. In this way, these chapters take their place in the whole plan of the book, and with literary skill and dramatic power lead up to the final consummation.

In the spiritual interpretation of these judgments, as for those which have preceded, we hold fast to the idea that



the writer is thinking of his readers and of their necessities and is keeping close to his purpose of encouraging them. A favorite way of interpreting the Book of Revelation at one time, the influence of which has not yet passed, was to find in these judgments a prediction of coming historical events, such as the Turkish Invasion and the French Revolution. The world war has naturally stimulated that kind of interpretation. Men have seen exact parallels between the catastrophes of this chapter and those which have befallen the world during these past years. But the writer is thinking only of contemporary history. He finds the material for his descriptions of judgment either in the Old Testament with its Egyptian plagues, or in the catastrophes in nature or society which actually befell, or were likely to befall, the Roman world of his day. The spiritual meaning of the chapter, however, is neither temporary nor local. The wrath of God does fall upon a recreant world. His judgments are true and righteous altogether. The cataclysm of the war years was in this spiritual sense a repetition of these chapters of judgment from the Book of Revelation. The Armageddon of the prophet's imagination became in very truth the vast slaughter-fields of modern Europe. No period in history since this book was written bears such witness to the essential truth of these chapters as that through which our own generation has lived. No detail of this terrible chapter has been missing. It has indeed been given unto us to drink "the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath."

Chapter 15:1. Then I saw another great and wonderful portent in heaven: seven angels having the seven last plagues which will complete the wrath of God. 2. But also I had a vision of the blessedness of those who had refused to worship the beast. These stood upon what looked like a sea of fiery glass and with harps 3. they sang a song such as Moses sang when the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt, but they sang it of Christ by whose death they had been redeemed, and they praised God whose righteous ways are unerring 4. and whose power is now about to be recognized by all the nations. 5, 6. Then I saw the seven



angels come forth all clothed in white. 7. And all of the cherubim gave them seven gold bowls filled with God's wrath. 8. And as of old the temple was filled with the smoke of the glory and power of God, so that no one could enter it until the plagues had been completed. 16:1,2. Then the command came to the angels from God Himself, and the first angel poured out his bowl on the earth and a terrible ulcer afflicted the worshippers of the beast. 3. The second angel emptied his bowl upon the seas, which became thick red blood, and every living thing in it perished. 4. The third emptied his bowl into all fresh waters, and they also were turned into blood. 5, 6. And when the guardian angel of the waters declared that it was just that they who have shed blood should drink blood, 7. the altar-angel answered, Verily the judgments of God are just. 8. The fourth angel poured his bowl upon the sun whose terrible heat then scorched men: 9. yet even then they reviled God and refused to repent. 10. The fifth emptied his bowl on the very throne whereon the beast sat, and darkness fell upon his whole empire and his subjects gnawed their tongues in agony, 11. cursed God because of their sufferings, and would not repent. 12. The sixth angel poured out his bowl over the great river Euphrates, which straightway dried up so that the Parthians could pass over as they marched against Rome. 13, 14. Then I saw Satan and the beast and the pagan priesthood emit evil spirits which looked like frogs which should incite the nations of the world to a terrible world-conflict, which will take place on God's great day. 15. (Remember, this day can come at any moment. Blessed is he who is watching and ready so that he will not be unprepared.) 16. And the evil spirits mustered the nations together for this last war at the place called (in Hebrew) Harmagedon. 17. The seventh and last angel poured out his bowl upon the air. A voice from heaven declared this to be the end. 18. Then there followed confused voices, lightnings and thunders and such an earthquake as the world had never known, 19. which split Rome into three pieces and shattered all other cities. Rome was not forgotten. She drank to the dregs the cup of God's anger. 20. Islands vanished, no mountain remained to be seen, 21. and crushing hail-stones fell upon men who continued to curse God because the distress caused by the hail was fearful.

*Notes* 15:1 Seven is the complete number. (See Lev. 26:18, 21, 24, 28.) v. 2 **Sea of glass** (cf. 4:6) describing the pavement of the throne-room of God. (See Ex. 24:10; Ezek. 1:26.) The notion of a sea in the heavens was common

(Gen. 1:7), and may have been due to the likeness in appearance of sky and sea. In this case the suggestion of fire here may go back to lightning. There is no special symbolical meaning. **v. 3 Song of Moses and the Lamb**<sup>1</sup> For a song of Moses for deliverance, see Exodus 15. Since the plagues which follow bear certain resemblances to those of Egypt there is no reason why this song may not have been meant. It may, however, refer to the song of Moses in Deut. 32, which bears a closer verbal resemblance to the song in this chapter, which is not one of deliverance so much as of praise of the righteousness of God in his dealings with men. The song is also of **the Lamb** because Christ is the agent of God in the revelation and execution of his judgments. **v. 8** For the cloud as a sign of the presence and power of God, see Ex. 19:18, 24:16; I Kings 8:10ff; II Chron. 5:13; Isa. 6:4; Ezek. 10:4. **16:2, 3** The first plague is like that of the boils in Exodus 9:10, while the second reminds us of Ex. 7:20 and Rev. 8:8. In the corresponding trumpet-plague, however, only a third part of the sea was affected. **vv. 4-7** has its parallel in Ex. 7:20, and Rev. 8:11. The song which follows is akin to 15:3ff, and has the same meaning. In the **angel of the altar** reference may be made to the souls of the martyrs, 6:9, or to the prayer of the saints, 8:3-5. **v. 10** (cf. Ex. 10:22.) **v. 12** The drying up of the Euphrates has for its ultimate origin, of course, the miracle at the Red Sea. (Ex. 14:21ff. cf. Isa. 11:16; cf. Rev. 9:14.) The dragon and his two agents make an unheralded entrance on the scene. The kings here are different from v. 12. Here all nations are meant, and are identical with those of 17:12-14. In this passage we have the preparation for the world-conflict which actually takes place in chapter 19. Of this preparation, the possible attack of the Parthian kings and the gathering of all nations are component parts. **v. 13 Frogs** Possibly suggested by Ex. 8:6, but more likely by a familiar figure in Persian mythology. **v. 16 Harmageddon** Not found in He-

<sup>1</sup> See Beckwith, pp. 676, 677.

brew literature. The author either invented it or found it in some source unknown to us and used it simply to give pictorial precision to his picture of the great and final battle between Anti-Christ and the Messiah. vv. 17ff. In the description of the last plague the author endeavors by every means to heighten the effect. The adjective "great" is used seven times, and the resources of his vocabulary are exhausted in his efforts to depict this final and tragical judgment.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE DOOM OF EVIL

*Revelation, Chapters 17, 18, 19, 20*

THE connection is clear between the chapters that have preceded and these chapters which follow. There we had described the beginning of the end. Here is the end itself. Precisely as the author carried the evil which he tells us is marked for destruction back from its temporary manifestations in history to its ultimate sources, so here in the account of its destruction, he gives us not only the story of the downfall of the Roman Empire (chapters 17 and 18), but also of the overthrow of evil itself as it is incarnate in Satan, the spirit of evil (chapters 19 and 20). Thus the full spiritual purpose of the author and the full spiritual unity of the book are achieved. What we are told in these chapters is the summary of the Social Hope not only of its age, but of every age. We are told, first, that this present world-order is under the control of God and subject to his righteous judgments. Nothing is more remarkable in the description of Rome in the seventeenth chapter than the full justice done to her power and regal glory. "There is not an untrue stroke in it. The woman is arrayed in purple and scarlet, the colors of empire. She is decked with gold and precious stones and pearls. The wealth of the whole world is poured into her lap. She holds in her hand the golden cup of an advanced civilization. She is poised upon the beast, the symbol of empire. She sits upon many waters, that is, rules over many subject peoples and nations. Tributary kings carry out her behests. It is a remarkable picture of the wealth and

glory and dominion of Rome which the author gives.”<sup>1</sup> But this is not the whole truth about her. Commensurate with the power of Rome is the guilt of Rome. This, too, the author portrays with unflinching precision. He uses the harsh language of harlotry which the Old Testament prophets had applied to Jerusalem, and calls Rome the mother of harlots, who not only had sunk herself to the bottom of immorality and idolatry, but had seduced other nations to the sink-level of her own iniquity and had herself become drunk with the blood of martyrs. With these few swift strokes the author depicts the terrible and irretrievable moral degradation because of which she is to be destroyed.

The spiritual truth of this chapter becomes the moral lesson of all history, and is the burden of its social message to its time and to all time. Pomp and glory count for nothing in the eyes of God. Nations are judged by their moral obedience to the eternal and just laws of God. The dirge which our author intones over Rome is reflected in Rudyard Kipling's noble Recessional:

“Far-called our navies melt away,  
On dune and headland sinks the fire;  
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget!

“If drunk with sight of power, we loose  
Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,  
Such boasting as the Gentiles use  
Or lesser breeds without the law:  
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget!”

This “valiant dust that builds on dust” sinks into nothingness in chapter 18 with a pathos and power of description

<sup>1</sup> Deane, pp. 202-4.

which is not surpassed elsewhere in the book, and a piercing lamentation is uttered by the beholders, who weep and mourn and cry out as they look upon the smoke of her burning:

Woe, woe, the great city. She that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl! for in one hour so great riches is made desolate. (Rev. 18:16, 17.)

The destruction of Rome, however, does not complete the author's purpose to demonstrate that the very principle of evil, of which Rome was the temporary and historical representation and instrument, is itself marked for destruction. To this consummation the author presses swiftly forward. After a characteristic introduction, contrasting vividly the picture of the ruin of Rome with the triumph of the hymning servants of God, who prepare for the marriage-supper of the Lamb, the heavens are opened, and Christ the conqueror is seen to ride forth followed by the saints of God "in bright array." "The King of Glory passes on his way"; and over against Him there are the beast and the kings of the earth and the pagan priests and all who have opposed God and persecuted his people. The shock of the final conflict is about to take place. That battle is not described. There is no real opposition. Evil is helpless before Him who goes forth conquering and to conquer. Only the sequence in the different manifestations of its destruction is given us. First the beast is taken,—Imperial Rome as personified in Anti-Christ; second, the pagan priesthood and the false prophet are cast into the brimstone lake; third, their followers are killed with the sword. There remains only the dragon, Satan, the original principle of evil itself.

The destruction of Satan is the theme of chapter 20, one of the most fateful chapters of the New Testament, if we consider its influence upon subsequent Christian thought. But for one who has closely followed the spiritual interpretation of this book, the meaning of this chapter stands out clear as daylight. We should not expect that Satan could be dis-



posed of as summarily as his inferior agents. We would look naturally for more resistance, for temporary escape and for final capture and annihilation. Precisely that is the account of the final duel in this chapter. Evil once taken, it seems as if the millennium had come at last, and for a time the people of God live in security and peace. But Satan will not yet submit. His might has not yet been overcome. To the very end, the author thus does full justice to the tremendous and tenacious and inveterate power of evil. Satan breaks loose once more for a time, but is at last taken and cast into the brimstone lake,

Where are also the beast and the false prophet, and they shall be tormented forever and ever. (Rev. 20:10.)

The doom of evil is complete.

The spiritual truth of these chapters constitute the final basis of the Social Hope, since they describe the destruction of evil itself. With that assurance, "hearts are brave again and arms are strong." We can imagine what it must have meant to those early Christians to read the description of how, one after another, the beast and the pagan prophets and finally Satan himself were sent headlong down into the brimstone lake! Upon our hearts the truth falls with no loss of meaning. Two thousand years have passed since this glowing prophecy was written. Rome indeed has passed away, but other agents and instruments of evil have taken her place. Other beasts and pagan prophets have appeared down to our very day. Satan himself remains "to compass the camp of the saints about." Millions of the best lives of our planet have within our own memory been sacrificed as a witness to his power over the world. All of the intelligence, civilization and even Christianity of the world have thus far been unable to curb his power or stay his hand. What wonder if counsels of despair prevail; if we are assured that evil is in this world to stay; that all efforts to dislodge it are necessarily partial and temporary; that human nature

cannot be changed; that there will always be war and hatred and its accompanying sorrows and sins; that only deluded optimists will ever expect sin itself to be vanquished? Over against all such unfaith there stands the imperishable message of these chapters. Like a bulwark they stand between our souls and ultimate despair in the moral victory of the Good. "And the devil was cast into the lake of fire." Evil shall ultimately be destroyed. Nothing in the end can withstand the righteousness of God and the omnipotence of Jesus Christ. This is the social message of the Book of Revelation. He who takes it and holds it fast in his heart is equipped and prepared to face, in the spirit of unconquerable opposition and of undying hope, the principalities and powers that still war against the purity of our souls and the welfare of mankind.

### 1. *The Scarlet Woman* (Chapter 17)

This chapter ranks in obscurity and difficulty with chapters 9 and 12, and 13 and 20. There may be some points in this chapter which cannot be cleared up to our entire satisfaction. Yet it needs to be remembered that, if so, these are its subordinate features. The main outline and meaning of the chapter is plain enough. There can be no question, for example, that the scarlet woman is the imperial city of Rome. When the last bowl has been emptied, the judgment of God upon Rome is complete. It remains only to describe her fall. This is done in chapters 17 and 18. In verse 18, it is expressly stated that Rome is meant. With this the woman's name agrees (cf. v. 5, and 14:8), her position on the seven hills (v. 9), the designation harlot, applied to Jerusalem and Israel (as well as to Tyre and Nineveh) in the Old Testament, and her identification with the beast, which we have seen stands for the imperial power of Rome. The author's purpose, then, in this chapter, is to describe Rome in her double

rôle as mistress of the world and the mother of harlots, before her utter destruction is portrayed in detail in chapter 18.

The interpretation of the woman sitting on the beast is not difficult after chapters twelve and thirteen. The author is here using the same traditional material, based on a myth which has been worked over many times before it came to its present use. It goes back, as we saw, to the chaos-dragon of heathen mythology, which in the Old Testament was transferred to Babylon, and again reshaped in the Jewish apocalypses, and finally applied by the Christian writer to explain the present and future persecution of the saints. Rome is called a harlot because of the well-known licentiousness which prevailed there, which is reflected in the writings of Paul. The many waters, as we learn from v. 15, are many peoples. The seven hills represent the seven emperors on whose authority the city's power is based. The names of blasphemy refer to the image or superscription of the deified emperor, which appeared and reappeared a thousand times, so that the city was "full of the names"; the heads and horns are fixed features that represent the power of Rome against God, and the cup of abomination is only another expression for "the sink of iniquity."

There are, however, two difficulties to be met in this chapter. The first is the relation of the woman to the beast. In verse 3, "the seven heads and the ten horns of the dragon must represent the imperial power on which the city rests. But at the end of the chapter (v. 16) the ten horns which now appear as foreign kings are enemies of the woman and bring about her overthrow."<sup>1</sup> Evidently the original figure has been modified. The most probable explanation of this strange conclusion of the chapter is this. As we saw, in chapter 13, the beast was identified (in verses 3 and 15) with one of Rome's emperors, Nero. Further, a Nero myth arose after his death, that he had not really died at all, and that

<sup>1</sup> Porter, p. 259ff.

he would come at any time to make war upon his enemies in Rome who had betrayed him. Later this mythical Nero was identified, in Christian tradition, with Anti-Christ. In chapter 17, this identification is made in verse 11, an obscure verse which will be studied later. The returning Nero, a mythical and semi-Satanic being returns, no longer as one of the heads (kings), but the beast himself, the embodiment of the evil spirit of the Roman Empire, who associates with him the (ten) nations of the world and gives them power to assail with him the city of Rome. "It is not surprising that the explanation of the beast is enigmatical; in symbolic representation, the symbol and the reality are in the nature of the case often blended. . . . In this case, the beast appears at one time to represent a single person, and again seven (or eight) distinct persons in succession."<sup>1</sup> Always, however, he is a *person*: either the Roman emperor or emperors (typifying Rome itself), or Nero, or Nero-Antichrist. It is often difficult to understand just how or when these are shaded into each other.

The other difficulty relates to the chronology of the kings.<sup>2</sup> The seven heads of the beast, we are told, represent seven emperors (v. 10) and the beast himself (Nero) is the eighth, though he is also a reincarnation of one of the previous seven (v. 11). At the time that the author writes, we are told that five of these emperors are dead, one reigns, and another is to follow, whose reign will be brief. Then Nero-Antichrist will appear and dominate the world for a time (12:6, 13:5) before the coming of the Messiah. Assuming that the author writes in the time of Domitian, for which there is strong evidence, the question is by what system of calculation can it be said that but five emperors have already reigned? For whether we begin with Julius Cæsar, or with Augustus, and even if we omit the three military rulers, Galba, Otho and

<sup>1</sup> Beckwith, p. 695.

<sup>2</sup> See Case, "The Revelation of John," pp. 341ff; Beckwith, 704ff.

Vitellius, the count does not come out right.<sup>1</sup> Commentators have manipulated their mathematics in vain, and have suggested the incorporation of older apocalyptic material, without the requisite change in the figures. It seems not to have occurred to them that the prophet might make a poetical use of figures; that he was not at all concerned about mathematical nicety in computing exact dates, but was much concerned about the question as to whether or not the deliverance for which he looked was long to be delayed. Chronologists have the same difficulty in Daniel which they encounter in Revelation. In neither case is the apocalyptist an historian. In both cases he is a prophet who tells a persecuted people that deliverance is at hand. Throughout the Book of Revelation seven is the perfect number. Why should it not be used in this passage in this symbolic sense? If seven, then, represents the whole period of Roman domination, the author says that five portions of that period have already passed, and that the seventh will be brief and that the eighth is the Nero-Antichrist whose function it shall be to destroy the Roman Empire and himself to succeed to power for a short time. The sixth king then, will be that emperor in whose time the author writes, that is, in all probability the Emperor Domitian. The whole passage is not a bit of mathematical calculation, but rather a bit of apocalyptic symbolism.

Chapter 17:1. One of the seven angels then summoned me to see the fate of the great harlot situated on many waters. 2. With whom the kings of the earth have been implicated in all manner of vice, and the people of the earth have been intoxicated with her immoralities. 3. So I was carried away in the rapture of the spirit into a desert place where I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was covered all over with idolatrous titles, and had seven heads and ten horns, the known marks of world-rulership. 4. The woman was regally clad in purple and scarlet, and decked with jewels, and the cup in her hand was filled with her immoralities. 5. Her name was Babylon, the Mother of Vice. 6. And I saw that she was drunk with the blood

<sup>1</sup> In order, the emperors were: Cæsar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero (Galba, Otho, Vitellius), Vespasian, Titus, Domitian.

of the martyrs who had died for Jesus' sake. And I marvelled as I beheld her. 7. And the angel told me not to wonder, for he would explain to me the hidden meaning of the woman on the seven-headed beast. 8. The beast, he said, once was but no longer is, upon earth. It will soon ascend from the abyss, yet to perdition it shall go, and all people on earth except those who are Christ's shall wonder as they look upon the beast that comes again after having existed once and then having disappeared. 9. Here is the interpretation of a truly discerning mind. The seven heads suggest the seven hills of Rome. 10. And these in turn stand for seven kings, of which five have passed away, one is now ruling and the seventh will follow, whose reign will be brief. 11. Then the beast will come whom we will reckon as the eighth although really he is but a reincarnation of one of the seven, and he is destined for destruction. 12. The ten horns also are ten kings although they have no royal power as yet, but get their authority for the brief time only in which they are associated with the beast. 13. They have a common aim with the beast to whom they give their allegiance. 14. These are they who shall make war against the Lamb and be vanquished by Him, because the Lamb is supreme and his followers are faithful. 15. The waters on which the woman sits stand for all nations. 16. And the ten horns are the kings who in alliance with the beast shall turn against the harlot Rome and utterly destroy her. 17. For God made these kings and the nations which they represent to have one mind in the matter and to surrender their rulership to the beast until the decrees of God are fulfilled. 18. As for the woman, you have seen that she is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.

*Notes v. 1* It is appropriate that one of the angels that had the bowls should make this announcement since what follows is an elaboration of the vision of the seven bowls. **Harlot**, (see Isa. 1:21; Ezek. 16:15; Hos. 2:4). **Upon waters**, cf. French, "Sur mer," and see Jer. 51:13. *v. 2* So Tyre and Nineveh. (Isa. 23:17; Jer. 51:7; Nah. 3:4; Rev. 14:8.) *v. 3* **Scarlet**, not referring to the blood of martyrs, but a sign of might. **Names of blasphemy**, see on 13:1. *v. 4* The imagery may be suggested by Jer. 51:7. *v. 5* This may refer to a similar custom among Roman courtesans, who wore headbands indicating their character. **Mystery**, i.e., something hidden. Suggested by the "mysteries" of Greek and Roman



religions. (cf. I. Tim. 3:9, 16.) The name is to be understood mystically. **v. 6** Here the sin of Rome reaches its climax. For the phrase, cf. Isa. 34:7, 49:26. **Martyrs**, or better translated, **witnesses**, or those whose testimony may be relied on. It is not certain that the word means martyr in the New Testament, although it occurs (2:13, 17:6; Acts 22:20) in cases where steadfastness led to death. **v. 7** The mystery which the angel explains includes not only the woman and the beast, but the whole of the following chapters, i. e., the doom of Rome. **v. 8** See on chapter 13, vv. 3, 8. **v. 9** See chapter 13:18. For **mountain**, in the sense of hill, see Matt. 5:1, 15:29; John 6:15. **vv. 10-11** cf. introduction to chapter 13 and to this section. For **fallen** in the sense of die, cf. II Sam. 3:38. **Goeth into perdition**, the destruction of evil is insisted upon everywhere in the book. **vv. 12, 13** **One hour**, i.e., a short time. **Ten horns**, derived directly from Dan. 7:7, 24, although differently applied. There they stand for a series of kings in the last world-empire (represented in this passage by the seven heads). Here they symbolize not Roman rulers but kings, who receive their power from Nero-Antichrist to war against Rome. The number ten symbolizes the completeness of all earthly nations subservient to Anti-Christ. **v. 14** is a rhetorical parenthesis anticipating, as frequently in this book, the final outcome. Note once more the frequent ascription to Christ of titles belonging to God, (cf. Deut. 10:17; Ps. 136:3; Dan. 2:47, 11:36). **Those that are with him**. The reading of the Revised Version is correct. The saints belong to the overcoming army of Christ (although not mentioned in 19:11ff): "Those with him shall conquer because they are elect and called and faithful." **v. 15** For waters as symbol of peoples, cf. Isa. 8:7; Jer. 47:2. **v. 16** (cf. Ps. 27:2; Jer. 10:25; Mic. 3:3; Zeph. 3:3). Chapter 18 is an amplification of this verse. **v. 17** **Will**, better translated *mind* in the revised Version, and refers to God and not to the beast. The nations are to remain subject to the beast, until the final battle is won

(19:19ff). Rome's destruction by the beast refers to civil war as an agent of God for the destruction of his enemies (cf. Ezek. 38:21; Hag. 2:22; Zech. 14:13. cf. also Dan. 7:8, 24ff.). See also II Thess. 2:3-8 for a description of the current Christian conception of the destruction to be wrought by Anti-Christ.

## 2. *The Fall of Rome* (Chapters 18, 19:1-5)

In this section we have a description in plain prophetic language of the downfall of Rome. Here are no cryptic figures of speech, no hidden allusions, no obscure passages. It is a clear, consistent and eloquent account of the terrible and final overthrow of the great Imperial City. With its close, Rome as the agent of Satan vanishes forever from the scene. The ruin of Rome is announced in seven distinct utterances. First, an angel proclaims the certainty of her downfall (vv. 1-3). Next, a voice from heaven warns God's people to flee from her allurements and from the sure judgment which is about to befall her (vv. 4-5). Again, the same voice calls down vengeance upon her because of her continued sin (vv. 6-8). Then, the prophet describes the lament which the kings of the earth will utter when they behold her destruction (vv. 9-19). In startling contrast to this, the rejoicing of God's servants are invoked, because of his vengeance upon their enemy (v. 20). Then, Rome's disappearance is typified in a great mill-stone which a strong angel hurls into the sea (vv. 21-24). Finally, the work is ended and a loud chorus in heaven celebrates the completion of God's righteous judgment (19:1-5).

The model for this description of the destruction of Rome was naturally similar passages from the Old Testament in which the prophets describe the downfall of ancient pagan cities. Readers will refer to such passages as Isa. 13:19-22, 21:9, 34:8-15; Jer. 51:8, 31-58; Ezek. chapters 27ff. The Babylon of the author's time was not dissimilar to the ancient Babylon which aroused the indignant invective of the

prophets of the Old Testament. George Adam Smith thus describes the place which Babylon occupies in Scripture: "Throughout the extent of Bible history from Genesis to Revelation one city remains which in fact and symbol is execrated as the enemy of God and the stronghold of evil. In Genesis we are called to see its foundation as of the first city that wandering men established and the quick ruin which fell upon its impious builders. By the prophets we hear it cursed as the oppressor of God's people, the temptress of nations, full of cruelty and wantonness. In the New Testament, its character and curse are transferred to Rome, and New Babylon stands over against New Jerusalem. Babylon is the atheist of the Old Testament as she is the Anti-Christ of the New. Her haughtiness and secure pride are the fruit of an atheistic self-sufficiency. 'I am, and there is none besides me. I shall not sit as a widow; neither shall I know the loss of children' are the words which the prophet puts upon the lips of the city. The same spirit inspires the new Babylon of the Apocalypse, 'She saith in her heart, I sit a queen and am no widow and shall in no sense see mourning.'"<sup>1</sup> Parallel to the doom pronounced upon ancient Babylon is the judgment visited here upon Rome. It is the last appearance of Babylon in Scripture.

Once more, we must render account of the inspired faith of the prophet which, in a day when Rome was apparently secure and its ruin was by no means imminent, could not only clearly see but could also exult in the downfall of the city as if it were something which already had taken place. Centuries were to pass before this prophecy was literally fulfilled; but so sure of it is the prophet that he can cast it all in the present tense, and can call upon the servants of God to endure, as if they, as well as he, could see with their own eyes the picture of the desolation of the city of the Cæsars.

Once more we need to remind ourselves of the eternal

<sup>1</sup> Isa. II, p. 188ff. Quoted in Scott, p. 275.

message of this dirge over Rome which runs like a solemn refrain all through the book and here rises to sublime heights of inspired eloquence. For Babylon never dies, until Satan himself is destroyed. As long as evil remains, it will be incorporated on earth in some visible embodiment of its power. The conscience of the Christian church will always confront some Babylon. If it accepts the message of Revelation, it will confront its Babylon in the exalted mood of this chapter. What a wonderful repetition of it we have witnessed in our day! No one will be able to read this book for years to come without thinking of the utter desolation of that great, proud empire which only a few years since stood like a monster with drawn sword above Europe while all who beheld it said: "Who is able to make war with him?" Once more and in no less terrible fashion than in the ancient days the judgment of God has been visited upon the embodiment in history of the principle of evil. No one imagines that the process will end here. The New Babylon will continue to rise from the ashes of the old until He hath put all things under his feet. Whenever the faith of men is tried; whenever their courage is put to the test; whenever arrogant evil seems to mock the good and to flourish its triumph in the face of righteousness, this chapter will constitute the ground of the Social Hope of Christians. With the faith of this seer, they will confront each new manifestation of evil and utter this prophetic dirge over it, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen."

Chapter 18:1. Afterwards I saw come down from heaven another great and powerful angel whose brightness lit up the earth. 2. And he cried with a loud voice saying, The mighty Babylon is fallen, and now she is but the haunt of demons, the den of all foul spirits, the cage of every unclean and loathsome bird. 3. For all nations have participated in her vice, and all rulers have been corrupted by her, and profiteers have grown rich through her ill-gotten spoils. 4, 5. And I heard another voice bidding God's people to leave her so as not to share in her heaped-up sins and in the punishment which God will not forget to

inflict. 6. Yea, may she receive what she has meted out to others, only in double-measure, a double draught of her own medicine. 7. Let her misery be as great as the parade of her glory and luxury. She imagines that she is secure and happy as a queen. 8. But in a day's time lamentation and death shall come upon her and she shall be burned with fire, for strong is the God who judges her. 9. And the rulers who lived in luxury and sin because of her shall weep over her destruction as they see her burn. 10. Standing at a distance, afraid of the conflagration, they cry out in sorrow, saying, Alas, for the great city whose doom has come in one brief hour. 11. And merchants mourned the loss of her trade, 12, 13. in all manner of luxuries and food-stuffs and cattle and of the traffic in slaves and the souls of men. 14. And vanished are the accumulations of thy soul's desire, all thy pretty adornments have gone, never to be recovered. 15, 16, 17. The traders in these wares, I say, mourned over the city that was once so rich and in an hour has lost all her wealth. And sea-captains and sailors likewise 18. bewailed the destruction of the city as they beheld its burning from afar, 19. and lamented the loss of the city whose trade had made them rich. 20. But let heaven and all its saints gloat over her, because God hath avenged you on her. 21. Then a strong angel lifted a huge boulder, and flung it into the sea, saying, Thus shall Babylon be hurled into the depths never to be seen again, 22. and no more music shall be heard there, and no craftsmen shall toil there, and the hum of labor shall not be heard, 23. and there will be no light, nor voice of merry-makers, for though the magnates of the earth traded with thee, thou didst corrupt the nations, 24. and she was the great slayer of prophets and saints. Chapter 19:1. After that I heard a sound like the shout of a great host ascribing praise to God, 2. because of his just judgment of Rome for her corruption and persecution of his servants. 3. Again they repeated their Halleluia as the smoke of the city continued perpetually to ascend. 4. And the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures joined in the chorus of praise. 5. And in response to a heavenly command, all the people of God join in a mighty Halleluia.

*Notes* 18:1 **Power** This may mean either having great authority (so R. V.) or power to utter his message so that all might hear it. For the last clause of the verse, see Ezek. 43:2. **v. 2** For this description, cf. Isa. 13:19-22, 34:11-15; Jer. 50:39, 51:37; Zeph. 2:15. **v. 3** It is probably a mistake to find in this verse and chapter proof of the ascetic ten-

dencies of the author. It is not the possession of wealth against which he inveighs, but its abuse. Thus, the word "abundance" (A. V.) should be translated "power" (i.e., arrogant luxuriousness). **v. 4** (See Jer. 50:8, 51:6, 45; Isa. 48:20, 52:11.) **v. 5** (Jer. 51:9; Ezra 9:6.) **v. 6** (Jer. 50:15, 29, 51:24, 56; Ps. 137:8; Isa. 40:2; Jer. 16:18, 17:18.) **v. 7** (Isa. 47:7-9; Jer. 50:29). The hatred expressed in this chapter, as throughout in the Bible, is neither personal nor racial but is moral hatred directed against the evil of which, in the Old Testament the pagan nations, and in the present passage Rome, are the visible embodiment. In this sense the motive is essentially and fundamentally Christian. It would be in the interest of Christianity to-day that we should recover some of its robustness and directness. **v. 9** (cf. Ezek. 26:16, 18, 27:5, 28-36.) **v. 10** (Isa. 34:10; Ezek. 28:18.) **vv. 12-14**. The list here is in imitation of Ezek. 27:5-24 (cf. Ezek. 16:9-13). The author's fondness for the number seven, in groups of three and four, can be detected in this enumeration. The merchants lament not only the loss of trade, but the waste of the articles themselves. **v. 17** Perhaps suggested by Ezek. 27:29, 32. (See Ps. 107:23.) **v. 20** Illustrates the author's fondness for parenthesis and contrast, as throughout the book. **v. 21** Suggested by Jer. 51:63; Neh. 9:11. **v. 22** (cf. Jer. 25:10; Isa. 24:8; Jer. 7:34, 16:9; Ezek. 26:13.) The abrupt changes from the second to the third person (cf. vv. 14, 15) are a common occurrence in the Old Testament. (cf. Ps. 52:4-6, 62:1-4, 81:10-12; Ezek. 32:11-12; Amos 6:3-7.) **Chapter 19:1-5** This passage plainly belongs to what precedes rather than to what follows. It looks backward and not forward. In verse 6, however, the new subject is introduced. **v. 3** (cf. Isa. 34:10.) **vv. 4, 5** Combine Pss. 134:1 and 115:13.

### 3. *The Victory of Christ over the Beast* (Chapter 19:6-21)

We have seen how it is the author's method to set over against the dark picture of evil on earth the glowing descrip-



tion of the joy, the triumph and the praise of "the heavenly host." And it is in proportion as we imitate the practice of this inspired book that we shall share in its hope and catch the spirit of its immortal courage. It is as we think of ourselves as "encompassed about" with a great cloud of faithful and triumphant witnesses that we shall receive strength to run the race which is set before us. The vision of them keeps breaking over the mind of our writer and the sound of their music penetrates his heart. This fact constitutes an imperishable part of the social message of the book. There is no separation between the church militant and the church triumphant. The struggle on earth is watched with breathless interest by the redeemed; and the strugglers on earth are sustained by the presence of those who have already come out of great tribulation, and in a real sense are fighting the battle with them and for them.

The first outbreak of this heavenly music, as we have seen, looks backward and celebrates the downfall of Rome. But with verse 6 there comes a change. Rome is done for, her dirge has been sung, the forces of evil that lie behind Rome must next be dealt with. So we have first this hymn in anticipation of the approaching triumph of Christ and his saints over the beast, the Anti-Christ. This chorus is sung in verses 6 to 9. It looks forward to what is about to happen. The relation of God to his people and of Christ to his servants in the figure of marriage is so common both in the Old Testament and in the New, and it has interwoven itself so intimately in the language of Christian devotion that it requires no comment for its understanding and appreciation. Over against the faithless harlot is placed the shining figure of the faithful bride of Christ. The bride in the New Testament is variously interpreted as the individual, the church, and, in the closing chapter of this book, the whole beloved community, the New Jerusalem. Just as Jerusalem and the people of God are closely identified in the Old Testament, so in the apocalypticist's vision of the renewed world, the figure

designating those who compose the community is easily transferred to the community itself. In using this intimate language to describe the final union of Christ and his church, the author is, as every reader of the Gospel knows, but reproducing the very mind of Christ Himself.

Verses 9 and 10 furnish a sort of transition to what is to follow. Precisely as the angel in chapter 10 (v. 5ff.) gave a solemn assurance of the outcome before the trumpets were sounded, so here we have a promise of victory before the last great battle is joined; and in verse 10 we find the prophet overwhelmed by the vision of the redeemed and filled with awe at the thought of the impending shock of the conflict between Christ and Satan.

The passage from verse 10 to verse 17 gives us an immortal picture of the conquering Christ. As we have already noted, this description of Christ as a warrior is an important and much-needed supplement to the picture of the meek and lowly Jesus as found in the Gospels. A great deal of incredulity which is felt, even if unexpressed, concerning the adequacy of the Christian ideal to the needs of the world as it is, centers at this point. The gentle and compassionate Christ appears as an inadequate ideal and influence in the midst of the blood and iron of this actual world of history and events. So also does the Christ of suffering and sacrifice. "It is not a suffering but a militant leader, we are told, to whom men must look for their salvation. It is not by suffering that God conquers death but by fighting. There may be sufferings, but they do not of themselves bring victory. The symbol of the crucifix jars on our spirit. We cannot accept the Christian crucifix and pray to a pitiful God."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wells, and they who feel like him, have but to turn to this passage of the book to find a conception of Christ entirely adequate to their ideas of a militant and conquering leader. Let it be remembered that this picture reproduces the masterful Christ of the Gospels too often overlooked by those who trust to

<sup>1</sup> H. G. Wells, *God, the Invisible King*, pp. 100-102.

tradition for their conception of Him rather than to the narratives of the Gospels themselves which give us many a glimpse of his heroic qualities, and to the idea of Him to be found in the Epistles, where He is described again and again as the Captain of our Salvation, putting all things under his feet and conquering every foe. Indeed, this passage in the Book of Revelation gives us precisely that foundation for the Social Hope to which, by the effort of their own minds, unaided by revelation, these earnest thinkers themselves have arrived. Not only does it give us the picture of a champion riding forth to challenge the enemy of mankind, but it invests Him with the titles and prerogatives of God Himself. Nothing short of this will answer. He must be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He must indeed be the invisible King, and such the prophet proclaims Him to be. This conception of itself spells ultimate moral victory.

The final passage of the chapter (verses 17 to 22) announces the final overthrow of the principles of evil of which Rome was the immediate, visible and temporary manifestation. The struggle itself is not described in any detail. Christ and Anti-Christ come finally face to face (verse 19); all is over. Victory happens infallibly, inevitably, automatically. The beast himself, and the false prophet, the priests of the pagan cultus, are sent headlong into the brimstone lake. Not only is Rome done for, but the Anti-Christ, the evil genius of Rome, is destroyed. We have the completion of the old myth found in chapter 12, where we might have looked for an account of the victory of the Messiah after he had grown to manhood. What is more, we have the completion of the prophet's idea, which is that evil itself, and not merely a temporary manifestation of it, is destined to be destroyed. This is the root of the message of the book.

Let us understand this, and the terrible vindictiveness of this language can give us no offense. Without doubt the spirit is revengeful, but so ought the spirit of a true soul to be against evil. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." (Ps. 97:10.)

Remorseless hatred of evil is a sign of sainthood. The blood-thirsty language is doubtless drawn from Jewish sources and is not tuned to our Christian consciousness. But it must be remembered that to be Christian is not to be tolerant in the face of wrong or to acquiesce meekly in the presence or continuance of unrighteousness. It may offend our taste to think of such a supper of God, but the idea underlying it is essentially, if terribly, true. It needs to be remembered that the language is always figurative describing only the consuming wrath of God.

Chapter 19:6. And I heard a confused rumbling and roaring of the voice of multitudes ascribing praise to God. 7, 8. Let us hail Him and be glad, for the hour set for the marriage banquet of the Lamb has arrived and the bride herself is arrayed and ready. 9. And the angel told me of the blessedness of those invited to this marriage feast, and that these are the genuine words of God. 10. And when I fell at his feet to worship him, he said, No; for I am but a fellow-servant with you and your brothers who are witnesses of Jesus. God only is to be worshipped. And this witness of Jesus is the very breath of prophecy. 11. And out of the opened heavens I saw a heavenly rider, named Faithful and True, on a white horse, and his judgments are just and his warfare is righteous. 12. His eyes blazed like fire, and he wore many crowns, and he had a mysterious name known only to Himself. 13. His garment was blood-red, and "The Word of God" is his name. 14. And troops of heavenly cavalry in white followed Him. 15. Out of his mouth came words sharp as a sword with which to smite the nations, and He shall rule them with an iron hand and execute the wrath of God, 16. for He bears the name King of Kings and Lord of Lords. 17, 18. And an angel in the sun summoned the vultures to assemble for the carrion-feast of the bodies of kings and captains, and horses and slaves, and high and low. 19. And then I saw the beast and his armies in battle array against Christ and his host. 20. And the beast was captured and the false prophet that deceived the people and caused them to worship the image of the emperor; and both of them were cast headlong into the brimstone lake, 21. while the rest were slain with the sword, and the birds were gluttoned with their flesh.

*Notes* v. 7 (See Isa. 54:1-6; Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 16:8; Matt. 25:1-10; Eph. 5:32.) v. 8 Righteousness means righteous

conduct, purity. **v. 10** This verse (as well as the last clause in verse 8) is regarded as an interpolation by many scholars. It is duplicated in 22:8, 9. If the prophet were forbidden to worship the angel here, it is hard to see why he should do so there. The last clause of **v. 10** is obscure. The work of testifying to Jesus, is the spirit of Jesus at work in the Christian; and this is the inspiration of those who prophesy for Him (see I Pet. 1:11; I Cor. 12:10; II Pet. 1:21). Thus the angel and the prophet are fellow-servants of Christ. **v. 11ff** Some of the features of the Messiah may have been suggested by the young sun-god of the early myths. Others are taken from Isa. 63:1-6 and Isa. 11:1-5. **v. 12** The idea of a secret name has been discussed in 2:17. There was a current belief in the marvelous power of such a name. See Ecclesiasticus 47:18 and the Prayer of Manassas 3. **Many crowns** signify universal rulership. The **Word of God** doubtless refers to the Logos of the Fourth Gospel, but it has little relation to it and is here used in a different sense. This is probably not a later attempt to decide what the secret name was. It is an addition to that idea. **Dipped in blood**, i. e. of his enemies. (See Isa. 63:1.) There is here no reference to the Cross. **v. 15** (See Isa. 11:4; II Esdras 13:9-11, 27-38.) **vv. 17, 18** (See Ezek. 39:17-20.)

#### 4. *The Destruction of Satan* (Chapters 20:1-10)

Rome has fallen. The beast and the false prophet who were the incarnation of the wickedness and pagan idolatries of Rome have been captured and destroyed. It remains to reckon with Satan himself, who is back of Rome (chapter 12), and from whom the beast has received his authority (chapter 13:2). Not until Satan himself has been destroyed will victory be complete. This thoroughgoing vindication of righteousness constitutes the moral greatness of this book. The author carries the conflict back from temporary manifestations of evil to its ultimate sources and roots. Root and



branch, evil is to be destroyed. Chapter 20, one of the most important and difficult and fateful chapters of Revelation, has this for its essential theme: the overthrow of Satan himself, the author and source of all evil.

Let the reader understand this fact, and the place which the chapter thus occupies in the thought of the author and in the development of his theme, and there will not be confusion in its interpretation. The one purpose of this chapter is to describe the destruction of Satan and the deliverance and reward of those who have opposed him at the risk and cost of their lives, precisely as the purpose of chapter 18 was to describe the downfall of Rome, and of chapter 19 the overthrow of the beast.

In the treatment of his subject, the author uses three different sets of material. First, he employs the old myths which we found wrought into the fabric of chapter 12. Next, he uses familiar Old Testament and later Jewish traditions with regard to the Messianic kingdom which all Jews expected would be set up on earth. Finally, there are ideas of his own, which are not to be found elsewhere in the Bible. These three sets of material are all arranged and governed by the single idea which the author holds before him in this chapter: "the destruction of that old serpent which is the Devil," and the deliverance and reward of the witnesses of Jesus.

In the first place, then, the author goes back to the old myths. We should expect this, since the author has already shown in chapter 12 that in dealing with the aboriginal sources of evil, he bases his description upon ideas common to all mythologies. The notion that evil powers are under the earth probably goes back for its origin to earthquakes and volcanoes; or, back of that, to the binding of the chaos dragon, which signified the setting of fixed bounds to the waters, "so that the earth can be freed from its ravages and can produce life."<sup>1</sup> This idea, reproduced in one form and another in different mythologies, found its way without doubt

<sup>1</sup> See Porter, p. 276.



into Jewish apocalypses, and was made use of in this book. Only here, the binding of the dragon takes place "not at or near the creation of the world," but at the re-creation of the world, the setting up of God's kingdom on earth. Thus the author turns the old myth to his own use.

In the old mythologies we also have the idea that the dragon was bound, breaks loose again for a time, but subsequently is retaken and destroyed. In the Persian mythology the dragon Azhi Dahaka is conquered and kept bound for a period but afterwards becomes free again and is slain.<sup>1</sup> This idea is reflected, if it is not reproduced, in certain Bible passages. A second conflict with heathen powers is found in Ezek. 38:39. (cf. also Isa. 24:21; II Pet. 2:4; Jude v. 6; Thess. 2:7-8.) Our author is simply utilizing old mythical ideas for his own special purpose, which is to affirm the final destruction of Satan.

In addition to this mythical material, the author uses, also, the familiar Jewish traditions about the coming of the Messianic age. All readers of the Old Testament prophets know that they expected and foretold the setting up on earth of an ideal kingdom in which the unity and splendor of the reign of David should be reproduced with the Messiah as its ruler. As time passed, however, and this kingdom was not realized on earth, there was a tendency to idealize, even to etherealize, it (see Isa. 52:11, 60:10-14). In the minds of expectant writers, it took on heavenly attributes and features, and there was a tendency to detach it altogether from the earth. The kingdom became transcendental and universal, its realm embraced new heavens and earth, and its people were the risen saints of God. Between these two, reconciling them, and bringing them together in a single conception, we find in the later Jewish writings the teaching that the first of these two kingdoms, the earthly and historical kingdom, is to be temporary in duration, the historical prelude, as it were, to the eternal and heavenly kingdom. The Messiah will be the

<sup>1</sup> Beckwith, p. 736.

head of the first, and God of the last of these kingdoms. This conception is found in the Old Testament apocryphal books. See II Esdras 7:28ff., where the earthly kingdom is four hundred years long. The author of Revelation has reproduced this tradition for his own purpose. He gives the figure 1000 as the duration of the earthly kingdom, possibly suggested by a combination of Gen. 2:2 and Ps. 90:4. Like all other numbers in Revelation, its significance is symbolical and simply denotes perfection.

Finally, the author inserts an idea in this chapter which is all his own, and is not found elsewhere in the Bible. It is the idea contained in verses 4-6, which have been called "fateful verses which have produced one of the least fruitful chapters in the long history of human thought."<sup>1</sup> In these verses, upon the basis of traditional material which has just been described, the author advances a Christian idea which is wholly new with him, that Christ is to rule on earth for a period of one thousand years with his saints, after which Satan is to resume his sway until the final judgment and the final resurrection. "These few verses standing alone in Biblical utterances, and apparently deriving their *formal* contents from external sources, have given occasion for controversy running through the ages, and for vast practical delusions."<sup>2</sup> And to-day, upon the basis of these three verses, there are thousands of people who believe that this literal millennium is to take place, when a visible Christ is to set up his kingdom on earth and reign for a thousand glorious years with his saints.

It is not our purpose to inquire into the genesis, the history, or the moral value of this literal millennial idea. But it must be pointed out that such an interpretation of these verses is wholly foreign to the whole method and spirit of this book. From beginning to end, the author's purpose has been to describe in poetic and symbolical and prophetic language the

<sup>1</sup> Porter, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> Beckwith, p. 737.

eternal and spiritual truth that evil shall be overthrown, and that God and his people shall triumph. He is doing this for a very practical purpose. He is not seeking to plot out the remote future, or give us either the chronology or the geography of the New Jerusalem, but rather to steel the hearts of Christian martyrs at a particular time and for a particular purpose. He uses in his preaching all the available material that he can find. Some of this we have been able to trace and some of it we cannot trace. Behind this idea, for example, of a temporary reign of Christ on earth with his saints, which, as we have seen, stands all by itself in explicit utterance, there may run a Christian tradition unknown to us, reflected in such Pauline passages as I Cor. 15:20-28, 6:2, 3. (See Matt. 19:28.) It has even been suggested that our author, upon the basis of this tradition, himself believed that such an earthly future millennium would actually take place. No one can answer that question definitely, either one way or the other. The whole spiritual interpretation of the book, however, plus the fact that there is no known previous Christian tradition to support it, argues strongly against the supposition that he did. In either case, his aim in this chapter is not "the revelation of a chronological program in the world's history," or the prediction of a future era, but something far more practical and spiritual and real. His aim is to set forth to those early Christians in a dramatic way, the spiritual truth that a special spiritual reward awaits those who are faithful unto death. Precisely as in the earlier chapters that reward is described in terms of a new name, or crown, and a permanent place in the Temple of God, so in this closing chapter it is described as reigning with Christ in glory and security. For that purpose those verses were written, and that is their use and value to us to-day. Whether or not our author believed that there would be any such literal and future millennium (and the strong presumption is that he did not), "we ourselves ought certainly to value it only for the distinctively Christian truth which it images forth, namely, that

the conquest of evil and real rulership in this world belong to Christ and to those who truly belong to Him.”<sup>1</sup> The essential truth and meaning of these verses both to the author and to ourselves is contained in the Beatitude of Jesus:

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

As for the ideas of the final judgment, and the second death and resurrection, with which the chapter closes, these are taken freely from familiar Jewish apocalyptic writings. The description of Satan's final effort to assert himself is a favorite theme in such writings, and the notion of a divine account of men's deeds on earth according to which they are to be judged is found both in the Old Testament and in later Jewish books. The idea of restoring to life some who had died is also common in the later apocalypses. Thus in the Book of Enoch we read (I En. 51:1):

In those days shall the earth also give back that which has been entrusted to it, and Sheol shall give back that which it has received, and hell shall give back that which it owes.

A general and final resurrection and a fiery torment for the wicked are familiar notions of Jewish writings, reflection of which are to be found in the Gospels.

This chapter, in its message to its own time, to our time and for all time, takes its place beside the other great chapters in this book. It is the same spiritual message which lays the foundation of our Social Hope and nerves us, as it did those early Christians, for our work as faithful witnesses of Jesus. First, it tells us that old Satan is going to be bound; evil, that is, is going to be controlled, and when it is, the world will seem like Paradise restored, it will seem as if the kingdom had come, as if the millennium had dawned. It is a description of a temporary flourishing of righteousness, temporary because Satan is only bound and not destroyed. The thousand

<sup>1</sup> Porter, p. 280.

years express no period of time. They express an idea. The author might have used four hundred or seven hundred or twelve hundred or any other sacred number; but the number makes no difference. The point is, so long as evil is controlled but not destroyed, the freedom from struggle will be temporary, and not eternal. After the respite is over, then evil will break out again. There will be a recrudescence of wickedness. Right again will be on the scaffold and wrong on the throne. It is not an easy victory, that of right against wrong, of God against Satan. He is not to be bound all at once. He may seem to be down, but he gets up again. We may seem to have him fast, but he will break loose once more. Is that true or is it not? We see it in history. Is there any better or truer way of interpreting the awful days of these past years than as a fresh eruption of Satan? We thought we had him down. We were going along so nicely. We were getting rich so fast. We had everything we wanted. We knew all there is to know. We had become so cultured, so wise, so self-sufficient, it looked as if we were on the borderland of perfection. Then, Hell broke loose; the devil escaped. In such a time, let us remember the immortal hope that is held forth in this chapter, which does full justice to the power of evil—the hope that one day Satan will be cast into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet are, and will remain there forever and ever, Amen. The chapter tells us that if we would reign with Christ, we must suffer with Him; if we would sit down with Him in his throne, let us overcome, even as He overcame. In a world still in the grip of evil and under Satan's sway, there remains the possibility of being faithful unto death, and so becoming priests of God and of Christ and reigning with Him in security and peace. The message of this chapter confirms and fulfils the message of the entire book. It promises the ultimate extinction of evil, and the sure blessedness of those who endure. Let us lift our eyes to that consummation and fix them firmly upon it. Not Satan bound, but Satan



destroyed, is the ultimate purpose of God. "And the beginnings of that experience are now. The overcoming Christ is with us, and will dwell with us by the might of his spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 20:1. Then I saw an angel come down from heaven having the key to the abyss and a great chain. 2. And he laid hold of the dragon, that is, Satan, bound him, and 3. cast him into the abyss and locked him up there for a thousand years, after which he must have freedom for a last brief period. 4. In contrast to the fate of Satan, I saw many thrones and they which sat on them were those who had suffered death for the gospel's sake. They sat now as judges, and their special reward was to share for the thousand years in the reign of Christ. 5. The rest of the dead were not restored to life until the thousand years were passed. 6. Blessed therefore are those that share in this first resurrection, for they will never taste death again, but will continue for the thousand years as priests of God and of Christ. 7. But when the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and 8, 9. shall assemble the remote nations of the earth in a numberless multitude for a final assault upon the city and people of God. But fire from God consumed them utterly 10. and Satan was cast down into the brimstone lake where the beast and false prophet are, to suffer eternal torment. 11. Then I had a vision of a God on a great white throne. From his presence earth and sea fled so far that they were no more to be found. 12. And I saw all the dead stand before God while their books were opened and they were judged by their deeds written in the books. And another book, even the book of life, was also opened. 13. And sea and death and hell delivered up their dead to be judged. 14,15. And death and hell were themselves cast into the lake of fire. And if any one's name was not found recorded in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death.

*Notes* 20:1 For the key to the abyss, see 9:1. **v. 3 Sealed** (See Dan. 6:17; Prayer of Manas. 4: Matt. 27:66.) **v. 4** Suggested by Dan. 7:9, 10, 22. The martyred saints sit on the thrones and judge the world. Judgment means the function of judging. (cf. Lk. 22:30; Matt. 19:28; I Cor. 6:2.) Actual martyrs are here meant. **v. 5 The rest** All except the martyrs; righteous and unrighteous alike. These are distinguished in vv. 12ff. Only the martyrs share in the glory

<sup>1</sup> Charles Brown, *Heavenly Visions*, pp. 247-248.



of Christ's reign. Their resurrection comes first. The general resurrection follows. **v. 6 Priests** (See 1:6, 5:10; Isa. 61:6.) **v. 8** Such a general onslaught of nations is described in Ezek. 38-39, and II Esdras 13:5ff. The names Gog and Magog occur in Ezekiel and probably go back to an earlier tradition. It is the author's own idea to represent Satan as leading them in this final attack. And God Himself destroys Satan, whereas in chapter 19 Christ overthrows the beast. Note again the interchange of the future and past tenses. **vv. 8, 9 Four corners of the earth** (cf. 7:1; Isa. 11:12). **v. 9 Camp** So Ex. 16:13; Deut. 23:14, not to be distinguished in meaning from "city." An earthly Jerusalem is meant. For destruction by fire, cf. Ezek. 39:6; 38:22. **vv. 11ff** This judgment scene follows closely Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 14:10; II Cor. 5:10; II Esdras 7:33ff. **v. 11 Throne** (cf. Dan. 7:9; Isa. 6:1.) The existing earth is removed (II Pet. 3:10-13) to give place to the new world. **v. 12** (See II Cor. 5:10.) A bodily resurrection is meant. On book of life, see 3:5. **Works** means their whole spiritual being and activity. So in 14:13. **v. 13 Death and hell** (See 1:18, 6:8.) **v. 14** God's servants are to be delivered from the fear of death. (Heb. 2:15; I. Cor. 15:26.) **v. 14** The first death is ordinary physical death. Consignment to the lake of fire is here spoken of as a new (second) sort of death.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BLESSED CONSUMMATION

#### *Revelation, Chapters 21, 22*

WITH the close of chapter 20, the last word has been spoken concerning the doom of evil. Every last vestige of it has been destroyed. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that this has been no easy victory. The long, hard struggle with Rome, with the beast, with Satan, has stretched through the Book of Revelation from beginning to end. The full and entire resources of God, of Christ, and of their servants and followers have been needed to put an end to evil; and the time required has tested the patience and endurance of the people of God. Here Revelation brings to us a much-needed social message. The trouble with workers for righteousness is that they expect a too speedy and too easy victory. They grow weary in well-doing because their efforts are not rewarded soon enough. They make up their minds in advance when they feel the end should come, and if it does not come, lose heart. This book teaches us otherwise. It tells us that potentially the victory has already been won; but it also tells us that actually it is a long way off. It bids us prepare for a long journey so that we shall not be disappointed if we do not arrive too soon. A journey is no longer than we make it in our minds. It is all according to the way we pitch our expectations. A great moral need in our day is the proper moral perspective. Revelation gives us that perspective, and this is not the least of the book's contributions to our equipment for social work.

Neither can it be said that the spiritual prophecy of this

book has failed of fulfilment. It is true that Rome did not fall within the lifetime of the author. But fall at length it did, and many a Rome has fallen since. It is true that no visible Anti-Christ appeared in the prophet's day. But the Nero-spirit was slain by the Spirit of Christ who assumed the control of the on-coming centuries. It is true that the end has not yet come. But it is also true that we have sufficient proof in history of the vindication of righteousness and the ruin of evil to assure us of the moral nature of that end when it shall come. The faith of the prophet has been abundantly fulfilled. Two thousand years of proof should be sufficient to cause us to embrace and cherish this faith in the struggles which still lie before us.

With the condemnation of evil behind him, our author has only to describe the salvation of God's people in order to bring his glowing book to a close. This he does in the two remaining chapters. These chapters fall naturally in two sections: first, the description of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, chapters 21:1-22:5, and second, the epilogue, chapter 22:6-21.

### 1. *The Holy City* (Chapter 21:1-22:9)

To the Christian heart these chapters are among the dearest of all not only in this book, but in the Bible. They help to explain how the Book of Revelation found its way at last into the New Testament canon. The history of the book is peculiar. "At the outset it was generally accepted. In the second century, it was among the earliest books to be included in the growing New Testament. Hardly any one doubted its right to be there. Yet in the third century the Greek theologians of Alexandria—Origen and those whom he influenced—were repelled by it, as are many to-day. Scholarly training could not understand it and could not reconcile itself to its strange thought and grotesque expression. . . . For centuries it was in debate in the Greek church: . . . to this day it is not a part

of the official Syrian New Testament.”<sup>1</sup> The Roman Church, however, held fast to the book, and it was finally accepted as one of the authoritative books of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> What were the causes that led to its retention? Chief among them, without question, was the immortal appeal of the book to faith and fortitude, and its glowing assurances of ultimate victory. But also, we may believe, these final precious chapters had much to do with the result. Doubtless they were read and re-read by early Christians as they have been by Christians ever since. They brought unspeakable comfort to them as they do to us. The Christian heart found that it could not do without them. There was no substitute for them to be found elsewhere in the New Testament. Their spiritual value made the church reluctant to lose them. They were found to be the best description of heaven, in the poetry of the human heart, ever put into language. Men have always wondered what heaven is like. To the Christians for whom this book was written whose friends may already have suffered or were to suffer martyrdom, these chapters brought an imperishable message of comfort. That message it has brought ever since. Any vision of heaven is welcomed by the hungry souls of men. Let any one be able to speak of what he feels heaven to be like, and multitudes will hear or read what he has to say. In “*Chapters from a Life*” by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, we have a graphic illustration of this fact (chapters 5 and 6). About the year 1863 a little book was written by an unknown schoolgirl only twenty years of age. “At that time the country was dark with sorrowing women. The regiments came home, but the mourners went about the streets. The Grand Review passed through Washington: four hundred thousand ghosts of murdered men kept invisible march to the drum-beats and lifted to the stained and tattered flags the proud and unreturned gaze of the dead who have died in their glory. Our gayest scenes were black with *crêpe*:

<sup>1</sup> James Hardy Ropes, *Harvard Theological Review*, Oct. 1919.

<sup>2</sup> See E. C. Moore, *The New Testament in the Christian Church*, pp. 182-187.

the drawn faces of bereaved wife, mother, sister, and widowed girl showed everywhere. Gray-haired parents knelt at the grave of the boy whose enviable fortune it was to be brought home in time to die in his mother's room. . . . Into that great world of woe my little book stole forth trembling. But the very title, 'Gates Ajar' caught the attention of the sorrowing multitudes." The book was everywhere read, and that Andover school-girl's description of what heaven is like brought comfort to hundreds of thousands of bereaved and lonely souls. This incident in literature helps us to understand the sacred and permanent meaning of these final chapters of Revelation to the heart of Christians.

Of the place and meaning of these chapters in the plan of the author, it is not necessary to speak. They are an amplification and confirmation of those promises to the faithful witnesses of Jesus contained in the previous chapters of the book. In no more beautiful way could the author have completed his inspired message. And in no more wonderful way could the Bible itself have come to an end. What a unity the whole Bible message has thus achieved! Genesis and Revelation stand over against each other, the last book in the Bible fulfilling even in detail the story of the first. There man was created; here he stands redeemed. There the heavens and the earth were fashioned. Here is a new heaven and a new earth. There were cities of evil, here is a Holy City. There was the tree of which man was forbidden to eat; here is the tree of life. There was the curse; here is no more curse. There the first man was driven out of Paradise; here is the welcome, "Whosoever will, let him come."

The promise of immortality has its permanent place in the social message of Revelation. Faith in immortality is indispensable to the worker for righteousness and for a world that hopes to achieve righteousness. This faith is not a mere selfish desire for the perpetuation of the personal life, or the selfish expectation of a personal reward. Rather it is the indispensable assurance of the permanence of the soul that

strives, and of the permanence of those spiritual ideals for which it strives. It is only as one believes that "he who doeth the will of the Lord abideth forever," and that "our labor is not in vain in the Lord," that one is given the spiritual convictions that fill his social striving with hope and joy. All history and biography go to prove that faith in immortality, and achievement in the realm of moral and spiritual endeavor, go hand in hand. These chapters are an essential part of the social message of the Book of Revelation.

The author found materials for his immortal description of the Holy City in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> We may trace their development in the following way: We find in the Old Testament the idea of a restored Jerusalem after its first fall. As we have seen, Ezekiel and Isaiah, when they picture the New Jerusalem rising from the ruins of the old, begin to use supernatural language. Sometimes it is only a city that has become morally pure, a "holy city" in literal terms. (Isa. 52:1.) Often the city is invested with an unearthly glory.

I will set thy stones with fair colours and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of precious stones (Isa. 54:11, 12). Thy gates also shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee (Isa. 60:11, 13).

Ezekiel in chapters 40-48 gives us such a spiritualized description of the New Jerusalem, closing with the word:

And the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there.

Of course it was of an earthly Jerusalem that these men wrote. Yet the more glorious the city was imagined to be, the easier it was to arrive at the idea that God Himself had first fashioned the city in heaven, and that from there it would descend to earth. This idea of a pre-existent Jerusalem is not clearly found in Jewish writings until after the destruc-

<sup>1</sup> See Porter, pp. 282ff.



tion of Jerusalem in the year 70 of the Christian era. Then, however, with the complete obliteration of all earthly hopes, this exalted and unearthly conception of a Jerusalem existing in heaven plainly appears. Thus in II Esdras we read:

And the bride shall appear, and she coming forth shall be seen that now is withdrawn from the earth (7:26). And Sion shall come and shall be shewed unto all men being prepared and builded like as thou sawest the hill graven without hands (13:36). For unto you is Paradise opened: the tree of life is planted, the time to come is prepared, plenteousness is made ready, a city is builded (8:52). For in the place where the Highest beginneth to shew his city, there can no man's building be able to stand. And therefore fear not . . . but go thy way in and see the beauty and greatness of the building, as much as thine eye is able to see (10:54, 55).

And reflections of this idea of a heavenly Jerusalem are found in certain New Testament passages, as in Gal. 4:26, and Heb. 11:10-16, 12:22, 13:14.

These, then, are the materials which the author uses. It is useless to ask how far he shared in these Jewish beliefs. That the early disciples held them, we know (Matt. 20:21, Acts 1:6). We know also that they gave gradually away before the pressure of more distinctively Christian ideas and that few survivals of them are to be found in the later and more spiritual portions of the New Testament. It is true that our author was saturated with Jewish ideas, of which this was one. But it is also true that he was a Christian. The fact that he uses Jewish material does not prove that he shared in the Jewish faith which produced it. He is forever turning material to his own ends. That he himself looked forward to an idealized Jerusalem on earth seems most improbable. What he describes is no earthly city. "The heavenly city remains heavenly in character though it descends to earth." He uses this symbolic language to depict the New Jerusalem which, most probably for him and certainly for us, is none other than the heaven of the Christian's hope. Using the longings of Israel for a New Jeru-

saalem, touched with the customs and longings of the Christian heart, he has given us this incomparable description of Jerusalem the Golden; of the presence of God and spiritual communion with Him of his faithful people. None but the most incorrigible literalist will think of analyzing these measurements of the walls, or of constructing any material notions from them. We understand this language to be wholly symbolic, used to give the *impression* of the glory, vastness, beauty and perfection of the heavenly life. It is indeed "to our great advantage that the Jewish prophets expected an earthly consummation, for they were able to give to this a vivid, concrete emotional expression, and the language of beauty and feeling in which they voiced their hope is a far more adequate expression of our more ideal aspirations than we could create for ourselves. Figurative language is the only language in which we can express our hope of heaven, and no figures can have greater power to suggest this hope than those taken from the literal longings of exiled Israel for the recovery of its land and city."<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 21:1. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and earth had vanished, and the sea no longer exists. 2. And I saw the holy city descending from heaven arrayed like a bride. 3. And a voice from heaven told me that this meant that God would now dwell among men 4. and take from them tears and death and sorrow and pain, because the first things had passed away. 5. And God from his throne declared that his word is to be trusted that He makes all things new. 6. He said: It is finished. I am the First and the Last, and I will give water without price to all that are thirsty. 7. The victor shall inherit all this and we shall be as Father and son. 8. But the faint-hearted and the faithless and the wicked shall have their share of the lake of fire. 9. And one of the angels who had the bowls told me that he would show me the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. 10. And, as in a vision, I saw the holy city descending out of heaven 11. having the glory of God and shining like a diamond, and clear as crystal. 12, 13. It had great walls, and twelve gates, four on each side, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. 14. And the wall had twelve founda-

<sup>1</sup> Porter, pp. 287, 288.

tions, one for each of the twelve apostles. 15,16. And the angel measured the city with a golden reed, and found that it measured fifteen hundred miles, and its length and breadth and height were the same. 17. He also measured the wall and it was about two hundred feet thick according to man's way of measuring which was the standard adopted by the angel. 18. The wall was of diamond, but the city itself was like transparent gold. 19,20. The twelve foundation stones were twelve different jewels, 21. and each gate was a single pearl, and the streets transparent gold. 22. There was no temple because God and Christ are there. 23. And there was no need of other light than their glory. 24. By this light shall the nations walk, and kings will bring their treasure into 25. its ever-open gates, which are never closed by day, and night there is none. 26. Yea, the splendour of the nations shall be brought there. 27. Yet nothing unclean shall enter into it nor any save them whom Christ hath chosen. Chapter 22:1. And he shewed me the living water which flowed forth from God's throne 2. through the streets of the city. And on each side of the river was the tree of Life which bore fruit twelve times a year sufficient to feed the nations, and the leaves of the tree served to heal them. 3. No one who is accursed shall be there, but the throne of God and of Christ shall be there, and his servants will serve Him 4. and see Him and bear his name. 5. And there shall be no night, and they will need neither lamp nor sun-light, for the glory of God will shine upon them. So they shall live and reign forever.

*Notes* 21:1 **No more sea** The Hebrews shared intensely the ancients' dread of the sea. Every voyage recounted in Scripture ends in shipwreck. (cf. Isa. 57:20; Ps. 107:25-28; Ezek. 28:8.) The idea may go back to the mythical notion that the sea is the symbol of chaos. **v. 3** (cf. 7:15; Ezek. 37:27; Zech. 2:10, 8:8; II Cor. 6:16.) **v. 4** (Isa. 25:8, 35:10, 65:17, 19; Hos. 13:14.) **v. 5** (II Cor. 5:17.) **v. 6** (Isa. 55:1, 44:3; Ps. 42:1ff, 63:1; John 4:10,14; 7:37ff.) **v. 8** (Ps. 11:6; Isa. 30:33; Ezek. 38:22.) **v. 9** By using one of the angels with the bowls for this purpose, the author contrasts the picture of the Holy City with that of the harlot city in chapter 17. Note the close correspondence of chapters 17:1,3, and 21:9, 10. **v. 11** (cf. Ezek. 43:5; Isa. 60:1.) **Jasper** is probably our diamond.<sup>1</sup> **v. 12** (See Ezek. 48:1-20.) **v. 13**

<sup>1</sup> See Hastings' Bible Dictionary, article "Precious Stones."

Taken directly from Ezek. 48:31ff. (See Isa. 62:6; II Chron. 8:14.) **v. 14** (Isa. 28:16; Heb. 11:10; Eph. 2:20; Matt. 16:18.) **vv. 15,16** (Ezek. 40:3-20.) It is not apparent that the author means to draw a distinction between the city and the wall. The two form a single idea. Each dimension measured 1500 miles. **v. 17** Since the height of the wall has already been given, it seems natural to understand this measurement to refer to its thickness. (See Ezek. 40:5, 42:20.) **v. 18** The details are suggested by Isa. 54:11ff; Tobit 13:16ff. **vv. 19-20** (See Ex. 28:17ff, 39:10ff; Ezek. 28:13.) **v. 22** The author leaves the prophets here where the temple is a prominent feature of the glorified city (Isa. 44:28, 60:13) and speaks like a Christian (John 4:21, 23). **v. 23** (Isa. 60:19ff.) **vv. 24-26** The author does not hesitate to introduce alien nations in his picture of the Holy City, since his desire is to describe the universal sway of God to whom all are subject. He is using well known passages for this purpose. (See Isa. 60:3, 11; Tobit 13:11.) **v. 27** (See Isa. 52:1; Ezek. 44:9.) **22:1** Ezekiel is closely followed here. (See Ezek. 47:1-12.) **v. 2** The first clause in this verse is best joined with v. 1. **Tree of Life** suggested from Gen. 2:3, 9. (cf. II Esdras 7:53, 8:52. See Ezek. 47:12.) The healing properties of leaves suggests the use of plants as medicines. **v. 3. No more curse**, or, more likely, no more accursed thing (Jos. 7:12). **v. 4** (See Ps. 17:15; Matt. 5:8; I Jn. 3:2.) **v. 5** (Dan. 7:27; Rom. 5:17.)

## 2. *The Epilogue* (Chapter 22:6-21)

With the fifth verse of the last chapter of Revelation the visions come to an end. There is nothing left for the author to do but to end the book itself. Readers will compare this epilogue carefully with the prologue. The correspondences between the two make it evident that they were composed together with the express purpose of having the same ideas stand both at the beginning and at the end. They are held

together by the solemn announcement of the same purpose, the same warnings, and the same assurance. Possibly the prologue may have been composed after the epilogue already had been written. At any rate it was certainly influenced by it. In both, we have the assurance that the revelation comes from God Himself (1:1, 22:6); and from Christ (1:1, 22:16); by means of an angel (1:1, 22:16); through John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8) duly commissioned (1:1, 9-11; 22:8, 10); it is to be read in the churches (1:3, 11; 22:16, 18); it promises a sure reward to the faithful (1:3; 22:7, 12, 14); and sure punishment to the faithless (1:7; 22:11, 18); the coming of the Lord is near (1:3; 22:6, 20); who was the historic Jesus, but is now the ascended and victorious Christ (1:5, 7; 22:13, 16). These are the ideas with which the book begins, and ends.

No one can read this epilogue and escape the conviction that when the author wrote it, he was in the grip of great spiritual excitement. It is as if he were tossing into this closing passage one after another the thoughts that rose like a tumult in his soul. Cool, critical analysts have found in these disjointed sentences, these ejaculatory interpolations, these repetitions and interruptions, proof of the composite nature of the book, and they would smooth it all out and arrange it according to logical sequences of their own. They only reveal how much they themselves are strangers to inspiration and unacquainted with prophetic moods and instinct. All through this book there have been interruptions and repetitions. It is part of the author's manner. He has sketched his drama in the large, and has followed his spiritual purpose from beginning to end with passionate precision. As we have seen, in constructing the different scenes he has thrown together his materials with regard to pictorial effect and general impression, rather than with a view to logical order and connection. That is what we should expect of an apocalyptical writer. He moves in a realm of great, general ideas and he labors under great spiritual emotion. He fills up



his chapters with a wealth of material; repeats the same idea in different form; has an eye to contrast; his fervid spiritual imagination leaps from one idea to another; he interjects brief prophetic utterances that disturb the exact sequence of thought; and breaks out in impassioned appeals and warnings as these capture his mind. It is all in the way of his writing. It is all according to his purpose.<sup>1</sup>

So, in this final passage, bringing his book to an impassioned end, he throws together what has been in his mind from the first.<sup>2</sup> Those early Christians must stand firm in their hour of trial. The Christian faith is at stake. The church is at the cross-roads. Be firm. These promises are sure. Christ is coming quickly. His reward is with Him. Blessed are the faithful. Swift and sure is the punishment of the faithless. This book is indeed the very word of God. O come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Two ideas stand out from this final passage which call for comment. One is the repeated asseveration that John writes from a felt conviction received from God Himself. These are not John's ideas. They are a message from God conveyed through him. Over and over again this idea has been insisted upon; in these last verses it is once more solemnly asserted. The author of this book, that is, is a veritable prophet. He closes the long line of inspired Bible writers. He speaks out what God has given him to say. We are reminded here of the uniqueness of Bible inspiration. There is nothing like it in all literature. The difference between the Bible and other books, as Frederick Denison Maurice once remarked, is that in other writings we have men's thoughts about God, but in the Bible we have God's thought toward man. The Book of Revelation measures up to Bible standards. Nowhere in the Bible do we have literature as such. No Bible

<sup>1</sup> See Beckwith, pp. 241ff.

<sup>2</sup> "Civilization will not be saved by flabby optimism, nor by irresolute good-will. It needs the virtues of the warrior and no call to its service is even more pressing now than ever was the call to arms," President Richard C. Maclaurin.



author writes merely for the sake of writing. Each writes from a conscious motive and for a particular moral end. So writes this inspired author. His message came to him from God. It came from Christ. It bore their authentication. It was given to the churches. It was given for a purpose. They who read it must not, could not, doubt its truth. The authority of the message of this book thus rests in the fact that it is grounded in the moral purpose of God. It is not something that can be questioned or debated. It is as if the honor of God were at stake. "These sayings are faithful and true."

For us to-day, the ultimate value of the social message of the Book of Revelation lies in the fact that here is no theory of social salvation, no scheme of social redemption, no human plan of social readjustment or amelioration. The world is glutted with these. Panaceas and cure-alls abound on every hand. Every age and generation has its own methods of reform. Behind all these, the worker for righteousness has this inspired book. It tells him that behind all the movements of history, and underlying all human efforts for a better world-order, there is a God at work; there is the omnipotent Christ traveling in the glory of his strength. Evil cannot permanently withstand these divine forces that already have decreed its overthrow. The victory of righteousness is involved in the very nature of God. Christ is the guarantee. Here is the unshakable foundation. In his darkest days in darkest Africa, David Livingstone could write these words: "He will keep his word. He will bring it to pass. I may fall by the way, being unworthy to see the dawning I had hoped to see. It will come through; it must come, and I do not despair of the day one bit. Doubt is here inadmissible, surely." It is the only sure foundation of the Social Hope. "These sayings are faithful and true."

What are we to make of the author's repeated assertions that Christ is to come quickly? The idea is repeated more than once in this brief passage. Let the book remain open,

instead of being sealed as in the case of the book of Daniel, for the time is at hand. Let the unjust remain unjust. There is no time for moral change. "Surely I come quickly." Did the author expect the speedy advent of the visible Christ? Did he look for the consummation of things in the near future? Was the whole Apocalypse an imminent event?

A careful reader of the New Testament will hesitate to answer that question dogmatically. It may well be asked "Who can say?" We know that the expectation of the quick coming of Christ runs all through the New Testament from beginning to end. We know that it was the fervid hope of many who lived at the age of our author, when the very contrast between Cæsar and Christ was such that nothing but an immediate return of the Son of Man in power and great glory would seem to answer the situation and assure the salvation of the people of God. Our author may have shared in that hope. Yet even if he did, it is to be noted that it is the spiritual and not the material meaning of that Advent which he impresses on his hearers. The sure coming of Christ is not a substitute for struggle; rather it is an incitement to renewed fidelity and endurance. The knowledge of his coming is to provide them with the spiritual assurance which they need in order to continue to be faithful unto death. That Christ is coming is the message of Revelation as it was of the Gospels. Be ye therefore ready, faithful, watching, waiting, working, struggling.

In this sense the truth of the coming of Christ is a necessary part of the equipment of Christ's servants to-day. It is a mistake to banish the notion of the second coming as if it were a remote and unpractical truth, lying in the sphere of speculation, yet having no message for us to-day. The Advent hope, on the contrary, is an indispensable part of our moral equipment. Without it, it must be urged at the end as at the beginning of this study, we are bereft of a spiritual assurance which is precious and essential.

It is possible, however, that our author in voicing his ex-

pectation of the coming of Christ was not thinking of his visible Advent, or imagining that the end of the world was indeed at hand. It may be that what he was looking for was an immediate manifestation of Christ in history, which should show itself in judgment upon Rome, and the immediate deliverance of Christian believers from persecution and death. This we have seen to be the theme of the book from beginning to end. At no time has the prophet peered into the future. Throughout, he has focused his eyes on the terrible emergency of the present hour. No single passage in the book taken by itself contains the idea of the bodily return of Christ. The whole argument of it moves in the realm of spiritual ideas. The whole point of it is that deliverance is at hand; and that this deliverance is bound up with the person of Christ. When, therefore, at the end the author says, "I come quickly," it is as if he said, "Salvation is at hand; the hour of victory through Christ is about to dawn." In that sense the words were literally true, and in that sense they were literally fulfilled. Christ came in judgment upon Rome. Christ came and vindicated his cause. There will never be an hour in history when the coming of Christ was so evident in its meaning and in its results as that fateful hour in the moral history of the world when into the hands of Christ there passed the control of the moral destinies of mankind. It did not come in the life-time of the prophet or of those to whom he wrote. But who can read the contest between Christ and Cæsar from the day of the birth of Jesus to that of the triumph of Christianity without echoing in wonderment at the suddenness of that transition, the words "Surely I come quickly"?

When one surveys the history of the world since the day when this book was written, what is more evident than the quick coming of Christ in judgment upon the world, and in vindication of his truth? How quickly that revelation has come in our day! Men were eating and drinking, marrying and playing, working and traveling in entire ignorance of

what was "about to happen," in the year of grace 1914, when without warning there fell upon this world a terrible judgment, a swift and awful reckoning such as it had never known. In an hour, thrones crashed to the dust, and institutions that seemed embedded in the very structure of society crumbled into nothingness. The social message of this book tells us that such swift comings of Christ in judgment are a part of the moral order. Upon them the witnesses of Jesus may depend. Such do not need to measure their hope by the slow movements of time, the gradual progress of the age, the disappointing ebb and flow of popular idealism. Over and above all this watching and guarding his cause there is the Divine Author and Reviewer of events. At any moment He may appear on the field of history when a thousand years shall be in his sight as one day, and that shall be brought to pass for which men may long have waited and yearned. This is the social message of the reiterated faith in the sudden coming of Christ. When the hour is darkest and hope is dimmest, and obstacles seem insuperable, and evil is triumphant, one can echo the sublime words with which the book closes.

Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

Chapter 22: 6. The angel assured me that these promises were genuine and trustworthy, and that they would soon be fulfilled. 7. Behold (said Christ Himself), I come quickly. Blessed the man who lays this prophecy to heart. 8. I myself, John, saw and heard these things. And again I felt like worshipping the angel. 9. But again he restrained me, saying, I am but a servant like yourself and your brothers who lay to heart the sayings of this book. Worship God alone. 10. And he told me not to seal the book for it must be read at once. The time is near. 11. Every one must not keep the character he has acquired: unjust, impure and righteous alike will remain as they are, 12. for I now come to reward each according to his deeds. 13. I am the beginning and the end. 14, 15. Blessed are they that are clean and pure (R. V.) and so have entrance to the blessedness of heaven from which all the wicked and the impure are excluded. 16. It is I, Jesus, who have sent this message to my churches through mine own angel: I, who am the promised Messiah, the Morning Star. 17. Both the Spirit

and the church bid all who will to come to the blessedness of eternal life. 18, 19. Let no one add to or take from the words of this book lest its penalties be visited upon him, and he be excluded from the blessings of heaven. 20. He who bears this testimony (Christ the real author of this revelation) says once more, Surely I come quickly. And the yearning cry of his servants is this: Yea, come, Lord Jesus. 21. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen.

Notes **v. 6** These sayings, i.e. the whole message of the book, although the immediate reference is to the vision preceding. **The God of the prophets**, i.e. the spirit of prophecy (See 19:10. cf. I Cor. 14:32). i.e. the divinely inspired prophets. God controls their inspiration. Thus their utterance is true and final. **Angel** here standing for every form of mediation by which the message of the book was received. **v. 7** As if Christ Himself spoke in the angel. The Lord speaks directly. (cf. Rev. 1:5.) The last words of the verse may belong to the apocalyptist. **Keep** means lay hold on, guard, lay to heart. **v. 8** assumes that John was well known to them. **v. 9** (see 19:10). If either passage is an interpolation, it must be the earlier one. It seems natural here. There may be intended a protest against angel-worship (see Col. 2:18). **v. 10** See Dan. 8:26, 12:4, 9, where the book, supposedly written long before the events described, is to be sealed in order to preserve its contents. Just the opposite is the case here. **v. 11** (see Dan. 12:10; Ezek. 3:27). "There is a tone of irony in the utterance" (Beckwith). **v. 12** (see Isa. 40:10, 62:11; I Cor. 3:8; Ps. 62:12). **v. 13** Added to give solemn assurance of what has just been said. This is the language used of God in chapter 1, but applied here to Christ. This interchange of attributes is not the least remarkable feature of the book, if we remember that the author was a Jew, writing within a generation of the death of Jesus. **v. 14** The better reading is that of the R. V. (cf. I Cor. 6:11.) **v. 15 Dogs** (See II Kings 8:13; Ps. 22:16, 20; Phil. 3:2.) **v. 16 Jesus** Used to emphasize his historic character. The name is used fourteen times in all the book, and almost always

in connection with the work of witnessing. **Churches** The seven churches are meant. **Root** means scion. (Isa. 53:2, 11:10; Ecclesiasticus 47:22.) **Star** (cf. Num. 24:17. See 2:28.) **v. 17 Spirit**, i.e. speaking through the prophet; **heareth**, all who hear the book read in the churches. These will join in the prayer for the Advent of Christ. Then, thinking of these hearers, the prophet changes his thought abruptly and appeals to all who will to come and take what Christ has to offer (cf. 13:9, 14:13). **vv. 18, 19** (cf. Deut. 4:2, 12:32; Jer. 26:2). This message must be received by the hearer without any effort to change its meaning or to evade its consequences. **v. 20 He who testifieth** The whole contents of the book is meant. **v. 21** The book closes with the familiar Pauline benediction.



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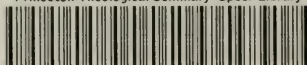




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